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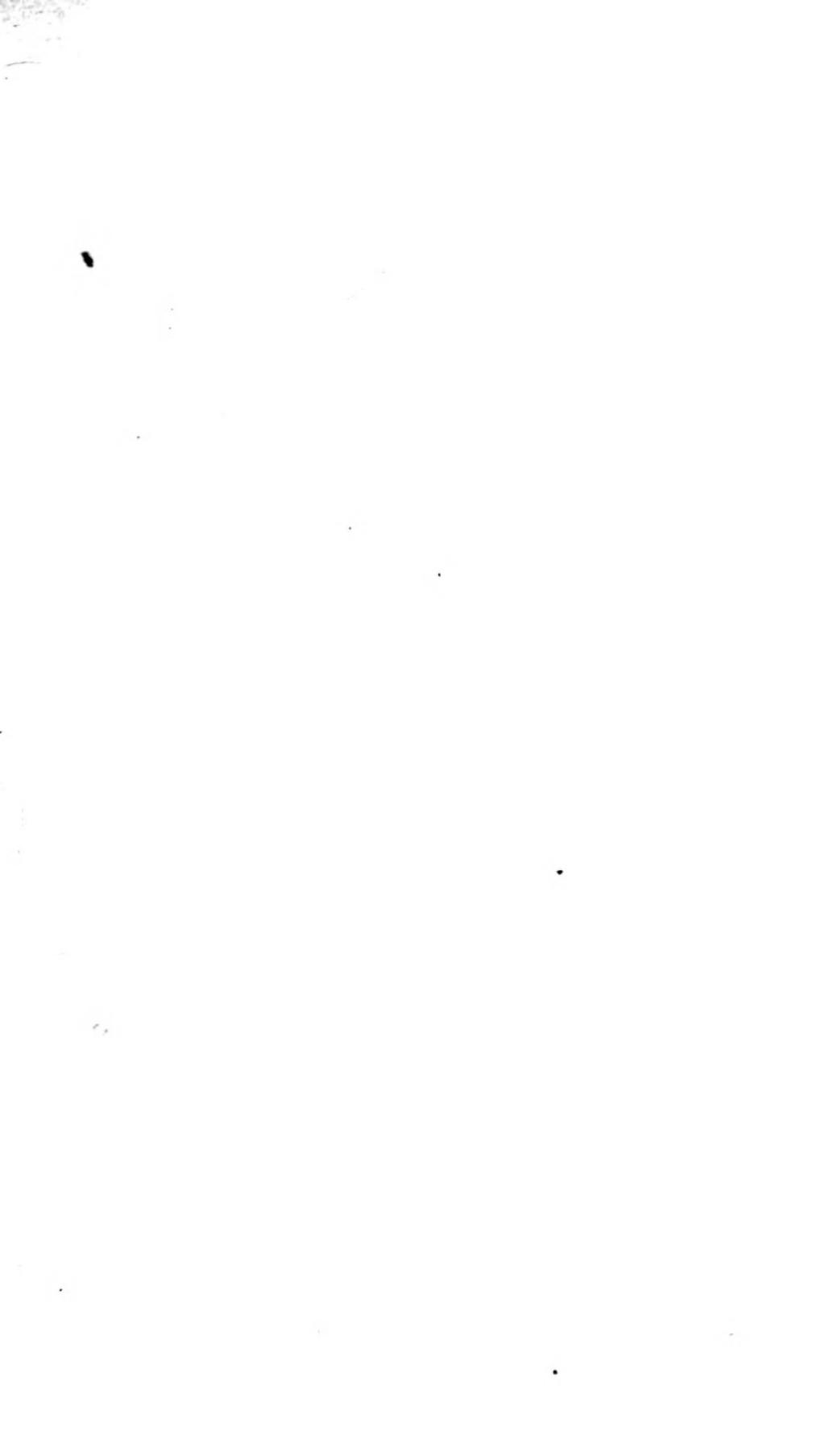
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POPLAR HOUSE ACADEMY.

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

" In every village, marked with little spire,
Embowered in trees, and hardly known to fame,
There dwells, in lowly shade and mean attire,
A matron old, whom we schoolmistress name."

SHENSTONE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL I.

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POPLAR HOUSE ACADEMY.

CHAPTER I.

Somewhat back from the village street
Stands the old-fashioned country-seat ;
Across its antique portico
Tall poplar trees their shadows throw ;
And, from its station in the hall,
An antique time-piece says to all,
‘For ever ! never !
Never ! for ever !’

LONGFELLOW : *The Old Clock on the Stairs.*

HOW well I remember that evening ! My two sisters sat looking into the fire, and I could see that Jacintha’s heart was swelling ; while tears silently rolled down Marian’s cheeks.

“Yes, I suppose that must be it,” said Ja-

cintha reluctantly at last. “ We need not have troubled ourselves to consider whether we could consent to receive my father’s protection, since he has placed us beyond the pale of it.”

“ And thereby relieved us of a difficulty,” said I ; suggesting a comfort that I felt was a very poor one.

“ The only thing is the disgrace,” said Jacintha, knitting her brow a little.

“ Oh, there’s the *sin!*” ejaculated poor Marian ; and tears at the same moment streamed so fast from her eyes, that ours sympathetically burst forth.

“ This won’t do—” said Jacintha at last, after crying very heartily.

“ ‘ Any good,’ ” added I, as if she had not finished her sentence. “ No, that’s quite certain. Come, let us all cheer up a little.”

“ How can we? ” said Marian, trying to smile, and lapsing into tears again.

“Marian, you’re eighteen. Jacintha and I are old women in comparison. Indeed, *I* am an old maid *really*, and have been ever since I was born ; and Jacintha will be, if she lives to be old enough.”

“Well, what then ?”

“What then ? Why, Jacintha and I not being quite so young and tender as you, do not feel things quite so keenly—though we do feel them bitterly, too.”

“That’s one comfort—I mean it is a comfort that you don’t feel them so keenly,” said Marian, drying her eyes ; “because I know very well that I do feel things too much, and I will cure myself if I can, and when I can—only I can’t do it all at once”—with a sweet, April smile.

“Of course you can’t. But, as I’m the eldest, you know it is my province to preach a little. Now, let us all compose ourselves, and

have tea comfortably, and then talk over what is to be done.”

“Oh, let us talk over what is to be done *first*, and have tea afterwards, please,” said Marian.

“Yes, I’m for that, too,” said Jacintha, “unless Isabella particularly wishes for tea.”

“Oh no,” said I, “I can wait—” (though I *should* have liked it.)

“Well then, now for it:—Here are we three spinsters, bereaved of our dear mother by death, and of our father by his suddenly quitting the kingdom with every penny he can lay his hands on—leaving us with nothing—”

“Except his debts,” said Jacintha.

“No, we are not liable to them:—except this house, I was going to say, which, luckily, was settled on my mother and her children—and fifty pounds a year each.”

“On which we must starve,” said Jacintha.

“Unless we do something,” said I.

“ Which of course we shall ! ” cried Marian. “ I’m ready, for one. Let me be the first ! I’ll go out as governess, and then you two will have time to look about you and let the house. Dear old house ! ” said she, looking wistfully round.

“ Marian, what nonsense ! ” cried Jacintha. “ I shall be the one to go out first ; you’re too young—who would have such a chit ? ”

“ I know I could not command such a salary as you could,” said Marian, meekly.

“ No, certainly you couldn’t, though you are twice as clever as I am, and much better read, and more popular with children—”

“ Oh, Jacintha ! how *can* you say so ? You are all that, and more ! I know very well I’m not equal to you ; still, I might do something, and we can but do our best, you know—”

“ There’s only one thing, Marian, in which I am your superior—and that is, in age. I’m ten years older, and shall therefore fetch ten

or perhaps twenty guineas more per annum in the governessing market.”

“ Well, I hope you may, I am sure, Jacintha, for it will not be more than you are worth ; and whatever I get, I shall be satisfied with, if it is enough to keep me from encumbering you ; though, of course, I shall be very glad if I can spare a little for Isabella.”

“ You seem both consigning me to very inglorious inactivity !” said I. “ Pray, what am *I* to do ? ”

“ Oh, you are not strong enough to do anything,” said Marian. “ You must live on the hundred and fifty pounds a year, if you can.”

“ But *I can’t*. What ! live upon your and Jacintha’s little incomes, as well as my own ? No, Marian ! I’ll never do that.”

“ Nonsense,” interposed Jacintha, “ *you* must not go out. You must be crazy to think of it.”

“ I will not go out, if you and Marian will not.”

“ Why, what else can we do ?”

“ Keep a school.”

“ A school ! Oh, horrible !” exclaimed Jacintha.

There was a pause.

“ I was afraid you would think so,” at length said I rather apologetically. “ The only thing is, we need not then separate.”

“ Oh, horrid !” repeated Jacintha. “ What ! a school in this dear old house ? What desecration !”

“ Suppose the tenant to whom we let it, applies it to that purpose ?”

“ Oh, we must provide against that in the covenant of the lease.”

After another pause, Marian remarked, “ I wonder what John would think.”

"I'm sure he would not like it," said Jacintha, shortly.

Another pause; again broken by Marian, who observed, "It certainly would be very nice for us all to keep together."

"So it would!" exclaimed Jacintha, with one of those revulsions of feeling which she sometimes exhibited. "Oh! I see it must be! I'll give in! We *will* keep a school!"

She had, I believe, been hastily turning over in her mind every hope of escape from it, without finding one, and therefore sensibly struck her colours.

"That's settled, then!" cried Marian, gladly. "And I have a presentiment we shall succeed, and like it very much indeed."

"Then now we'll have tea," said I, ringing for it as I spoke. At the same moment, the tinkle of a muffin-bell was heard in the street.

I have an affection for the muffin-bell. I

inherit it from my mother, who used to say it always called up in her imagination pictures of tradesmen's snug little tea-tables, in small back-parlours behind the shop, where a bright kettle was singing on the hob, and a sleek cat sleeping on the clean hearth.

"Come, we'll have some muffins," said I munificently, as Hawkins spread the table-cover.

"Don't launch into extravagances already, Isabella," said Jacintha; "it will do us much more good to begin self-denial. I don't care for muffins."

"Then where's the self-denial?" said I, laughing. "I do, and so does Marian, I know. Here's a sixpence, Hawkins, to invest for us in muffins and crumpets. See that you make a good bargain."

"Isabella reminds me of Moore's lines," said Marian, humming them playfully, not sentimentally—

“ ‘ Come, chase that starting tear away,
Ere mine to meet it springs !
To-night, at least to-night be gay,
Whate’er to-morrow brings ! ’ ”

“ *Ergo*, eat muffins, and put an extra spoonful of tea into the teapot,” said I, laughing, as Marian proceeded to measure the tea, not with a spoon, but a little silver shell, out of a small silver caddy, engraven, not embossed, and worn exceeding thin by the plate-leathers of three generations.

I observed Hawkins give a puzzled, half-peevish, half-pleased look, as she took the money, and eyed us one after the other.

“ Well, Hawkins, what is it ? ” said I.

“ Oh, there, I’m glad to see your spirits mending,” said she, with a little jerk of the chin; “ but, sure enough, I *do* wonder sometimes what the ladies is laughing at ! ”

“ One of the Miss Middlemasses’ wonderful

jokes, you dull old Hawkins!" said Marian, with a pat on her shoulder.

"The *Misses Middlemass*," said I.

"Oh no, for pity's sake, no!" cried Jacintha. "Rather, set grammar at defiance—such a blue-board academy phrase! 'Seminary for young ladies, by the *Misses Middlemass*.'—Horrible!"

"Suppose we ignore seminaries and academies, and prohibit the words horrible and horrid till after tea," said I: "otherwise, I must say, 'Miss Marian, pass the mark!'"

We all laughed.

"Another of 'the ladies' queer jokes,' Hawkins will think," said Marian, merrily. "Poor old soul! she can't imagine what we find in them to laugh at, nor how we can laugh at all."

"Family jokes," said Jacintha. "Few out of the magic circle can see the point of them."

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“They are excellent things, though,” said I: “a good stock in hand of familiar, harmless mirth.”

“Dear me, how people will open their eyes when they hear what we are going to do!” said Jacintha.

“If they do nothing worse than that, we need not mind it much,” said I.

“Worse? I hope and expect they’ll do ‘a deal better,’ as Hawkins says!” cried Marian. “Opening their eyes would not get us any pupils: I expect them to open their ears, and hearts, and purses. Depend on it, we shall soon be obliged to say ‘a limited number only is taken!'”

“Ah, that’s a professional fiction,” said Jacintha. “Schoolmasters and schoolmistresses generally limit themselves to as many as they can get.”

“Or their houses can hold,” suggested I.

“Only bachelors’ houses are elastic. Come, Marian, dispense the herb that cheers but not inebriates. Here come the muffins.”

“The idea!” presently exclaimed Jacintha; “the idea that pupils will pour in! How do we know we shall get even one? I dare say we shall not.”

“One would be worse than none,” said I; “for there would be all the routine, with very little return.”

“On the contrary, *I* should very gladly begin with only one,” said Marian; “and rather prefer it, because it would be some one to practice on, before we committed any blunders on a magnified scale. What ought the routine to be, I wonder?”

We were all profoundly ignorant. Not one of us had ever been at school. My mother had educated me, with the assistance of masters; and I, with the assistance of masters, had educated my sisters.

"Oh, we shall soon arrange all that," said Jacintha; "I have not the least fear of anything of that kind."

"Nor I, with two so clever as Isabella and you to arrange it," said Marian; "I only thought you could give me some little notion."

"We'll put it all down on paper after tea," said I; "that will be the only way."

"Yes; because we really must have something definite before us," said Marian. "I suppose we must have a French and English teacher."

"Dear me, no."}

"Dear me, yes."}

Said I and Jacintha at the same moment.

"*No!*" repeated Jacintha, with surprise.

"Well, I have a prejudice against French teachers," said I. "I confess, I fancy them all profligate and treacherous, and too much for us simple unsophisticated bodies. They would get flirting with the dancing-master, or

reading French novels in bed ; or—there's no knowing what they might not do. I am sure it would disturb my rest at night.”

“ But, my dear Isabella— !”

“ But, my dear Jacintha, we shall do perfectly well without one. Good old Monsieur Hébert gave you an excellent French accent ; and, besides, who wants to speak French like a native, in this place ? Let us limit our undertakings to our capabilities : teach what we know to as many as we can teach, and no more : then, all the profits will be ours, instead of being cut up by having to pay salaries.”

“ Surely that is a sensible idea !” cried Marian appealingly to Jacintha, who looked dubious. “ Yes, yes ; you shall teach French and take the general superintendence ; Isabella will keep house, receive visitors, and have a class in the parlour for composition and Italian,

and sit by when the music and drawing masters come ; and I will take the general drudgery that any one not an idiot may fearlessly undertake—reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar—”

“ Marian, Marian !” interposed Jacintha.

“ And use of the globes !” added Marian, laughingly. “ A school would not be a school without that !”

A pause ensued.

“ What is Isabella thinking of ?” said Marian, softly.

“ Why,” said I, with a little hesitation, “ I don’t like seeing any defect in my own scheme ; but—”

“ But what ?”

“ If this is carried out, I fear that Jacintha and you will never marry.”

“ Oh, pray don’t let that trouble you !” said Jacintha, reining up her head.

“No, it really should not,” pursued Marian earnestly; “because, what has prevented our marrying hitherto, if any suitable persons had wanted to marry us? You know very well, Isabella, such persons do not abound here, or *you* would not have remained single, unless by your own choice; and as for Jacintha,—when some one worthy of her, and whom *she* can consent to admit to be so, shall appear, never fear his making his way to her, whether we keep a school or not!”

“The simplicity of the child!” said Jacintha, looking across to me, with a smile and a sigh.

“Child! I’m eighteen!” cried Marian. “And as steady as old Time! Please don’t lower my dignity, Jacintha, or it will be impossible for me to inspire respect.”

“From the one pupil! Oh dear, no! I won’t lower your dignity.”

“ What will be the first step you shall take, Isabella ? ”

“ I rather think I shall call upon Mrs. Meade.”

“ Mrs. Meade ? What can *she* know about school-keeping ? ” cried Jacintha.

“ Not much more than she does about almost everything else, probably,” said I ; “ but there is hardly a subject on which she cannot say something to the purpose. Besides, she is a good sympathizer, which is always a comfort ; and perhaps she may even get us a pupil.”

“ *She* ? ”

“ Yes. Do not recoil too impatiently from any opening. Afterwards, I think I shall call upon Mrs. Cole.”

“ Oh, Isabella ! ”

“ I know her to be no favourite of yours, nor is she of mine ; but you must remember she is a retired schoolmistress—”

"True! this is the first time I ever forgot it," said Jacintha.

"And may have valuable information to impart."

"Depend on it she won't give it you!"

"Well, we shall see. Why should I depend on it before I have tried?"

"Oh, if you like to," said Jacintha, with distaste.

"What do *you* mean to do?" said I. "I think it will be a very good plan for us each to do whatever we can, to-morrow, according to our several judgments."

"Then I shall call on Mrs. Forsyth," said Jacintha, with decision.

"I don't think much good is likely to accrue from that," said I.

"No more than I think there is any good in your calling on Mrs. Cole," retorted Jacintha.

"We each have our cronies," observed Marian.

"Crony is hardly a suitable word for a Mrs. Forsyth," said Jacintha.

"*I* shall call on Mrs. Christmas," said Marian.

"Marian!"

"I shall! We each have our cronies." And again, old Hawkins, as she entered to clear the table, was cheered with that sweet, silvery laugh.

"Another of the Miss Middlemasses' funny jokes, Hawkins."

"Dear ladies, I hopes the muffins was to your mind."

"Quite, thank you: I feel all the better for them; and so, I dare say, do my sisters, for they could not touch their dinner."

"Ah, that is why you thought of the muffins," said Jacintha. "Well, it really was kind of you."

When candles were lit and the table cleared, Marian set to work with writing materials, to sketch out her crude ideas of cards, circulars, and "the daily routine."

"I wonder," said she, after having been thus employed for some time, "I wonder what John will think of it."

"Time enough for him to know when all is settled," said Jacintha.

I believe we each had our misgivings on the subject.

CHAPTER II.

A husbandman, whose three sons were not always on the best terms, one day pointed to a fagot, and desired each of them in turn to try to break it. After they had all failed, he directed them to untie it, and then try to snap each stick separately ; which they did with ease. Then said the old man, “ Thus you, my children, as long as you remain united, are a match for all your enemies ; but, differ and separate, and you are all undone ! ”—*Æsop’s Fables.*

IT appears to me that the Middlemasses have always thought sufficiently well of themselves. By this I may be understood to imply that we have thought rather more of ourselves than there was, perhaps, any absolute occasion for. Thus, we were not of the lower ranks, but were not high born ; and yet we thought and talked a good deal of “ the family,” though we knew nothing of it beyond our grandfather

—a plain, honest man. Also, we were apt to think we had sustained heavy losses, and been reduced from great affluence; whereas our means had never been more than moderate, though extremely comfortable, till my father's expensive courses began. Again, we regarded our domestic misfortunes as remarkably hard and worthy of a very extraordinary amount of sympathy from our friends; whereas I now incline to believe that hundreds and thousands of families of the middle class might have been found at any time, in any part of the United Kingdoms, who would have thought their lot vastly bettered indeed, had it been no more aggravated than ours. However, fortunately for us, there was a sincerity in our representations of our affairs, which completely won over the majority of our acquaintance to view them precisely as we did. We were very much pitied and condoled with, and great allowances

were made for us, and a great deal of interest and curiosity elicited about what we should do and how we should do it; though, after all, perhaps, we may have occupied far less of their thoughts in this way than we supposed.

Our maternal grandfather and grandmother were a worthy couple of the name of Edmonstone. They lived in the small but cheerful country town of Bayford, in the very house we now occupied. From this house my mother married; in this house, my aunt Christy continued to minister to her parents till they dropped off; to this house, we Middlemass girls used to be uncommonly glad to pay long visits, whether in winter or summer, to grand-papa and grandmamma, till such time as we got dreadfully home-sick, and privately sent a line to mamma to beg to be recalled. These visits afforded us our only glimpses of the country; for our father, who was a busy man

in the city, contented himself with renting a good family house, neither in nor out of town, and never sent us to the sea-side. We used to be very happy during the early part of our lives : the first half of the day was engaged in lessons, under my mother's superintendence ; then came walking, a visit or two to pay or receive, and my father's return in the evening. This was always the signal for cheerfulness ; he used to come home for relaxation, and liked to see my mother nicely dressed and everything in apple-pie order for him. When we were too young to dine late, they generally dined by themselves ; but my mother was one of those who, while practising a genteel economy, always knew how to give a genial air to a meal, though it were but a cold joint of mutton. The plate would be bright, the vegetables delicately dressed, proper condiments at hand, and a pudding, devised or perhaps made by herself,

would crown the feast. She would not buy salmon at three shillings a pound, but she did not grudge sixteen-pence ; she would not give half-a-crown for a peach, but would have the freshest, ripest of strawberries and cherries in their season. My father was a tall, strikingly handsome man, though his hair was as white as snow. He always brought home the news of the day, which my mother enjoyed hearing him retail, for she had no leisure hours to waste in the morning over the *Times* ; and, as he came out with one scrap of information after another, over his wine and walnuts, it is surprising to think to what account she could turn it.

“ ‘ Hurricane at the Caraccas : ’ Marian, where are the Caraccas ? Turn to the atlas, dear. ‘ An opera by Bononcini is going to be revived : ’ Isabella, I forget about Bononcini—was not he a rival of Handel’s ? ‘ Some new

discoveries made at Pompeii : ' by the by, Jacintha, you can tell us, I fancy, when Pompeii was overwhelmed ? '

Yes, those were pleasant days. John (the only boy among us, born after me and before Jacintha) was at Merchant Taylors' School ; but we had enough of him, if not rather too much, in the holidays ; and sometimes we were very glad when he went down to finish them off with grandpapa and grandmamma Edmonstone.

We were glad when he went there, but we were still more glad to go ourselves. Oh, how joyful we were, when my mother or my father accompanied one or two of us to the coach-office in Bishopgate Street, saw us safely ensconced inside the old stage-coach, and our small box safely stowed on the roof, under the tarpaulin, and then charged us with messages and advice, and smiled and nodded to the last ! How we could hardly sit still with delight and

impatience to be off, unless there were five other insides, or one or two cross enough for five ; which subdued us very much. But it was generally my luck to travel with some nice old gentleman ; it occurred so often that at last I used quite to look out for him, and be disappointed if he did not appear. He and I generally got very cordial towards the end of the journey, and he learnt a good deal more of my history than I did of his. We used to know all the pretty wayside inns where the horses would be changed ; and, just as day was closing, whether in a glare of midsummer sunshine or shrouded in December gloom, we would dash up to “The White Hart,” Bayford, and see our upright, white-headed, brisk-looking old grandfather standing just under the porch beside the innkeeper, ready to receive us and carry us home.

That home was at the end of the town—at the

end of the principal street, just where it began to fall off into fields and gardeners'-grounds—and at the end of a long narrow front garden with a double avenue of fine poplars, a carriage sweep, and a long, oval grass-plat. Five or six wide shallow steps led up to the house-door, which had a handsome, heavily carved architrave, almost as cumbrous as a pulpit sounding-board, and opened into a square hall, paved with black and white marble in diamonds or lozenges.

The ceiling was painted in uncommonly vivid oil colours, by a free, masterly hand, with sprawling goddesses and cupids embedded in clouds. The staircase was double, forming several right-angles, and of carved oak. On the right hand was the drawing-room, with its carved ceiling, cornice, and high mantelpiece; on the left, the long, narrow dining-room, with its strait-backed chairs worked in Turk-stitch.

Both these apartments had smaller rooms beyond, and there was another sitting-room behind the drawing-room, appropriated to my grandfather's use. Upstairs were numerous bedrooms and dressing-rooms, on various levels; on the basement, excellent servants' offices. Coach-house and stables on one side the house; good kitchen-garden, bowling-green, and formally laid out flower-garden behind.

Such was the house to which we delighted to repair; capering up the steps to greet my grandmother and aunt, with broad smiles and impetuous kisses. Sometimes Jacintha and I were sent together; sometimes, I was allowed to undertake the charge of the more timid Marian, and, in earlier times, I often went by myself; but latterly, when my dear mother required more of my care, I was the one who went least frequently.

Behold us proceeding in procession to the

bedroom with clean white dimity furniture, that had been duly prepared for us : grandmamma, in her voluminous habiliments, sailing before us ; aunt Christy, who is short, fat, and rosy, with an arm round our waists, and Hawkins, who was then only beginning to be rather an old-maidish parlour-maid, carrying the boxes, while grandpapa stood at the hall-door rummaging out sixpence for the porter. What an immensity we had to tell about papa, mamma, and ourselves ! How very little leisure we found for asking questions ! How aunt Christy would laugh at our talking ourselves out of breath !—how grandmamma, never satiated, would enjoy it all ; and how tardily we at length went down to dinner !

Then there was grandpapa to begin with again. There was little done but talking the first evening. Perhaps a song might be sung —a piece of fancy-work produced and criticized,

but very few stitches were taken. Dear me ! it seems but yesterday. We got dreadfully sleepy at last, being a good deal shaken by the journey ; and grandmamma would bring out rich seed-cake, and plum-cake, and biscuits for supper ; and we secretly felt we could have eaten them all and more—we were so hungry !

No danger of lying awake that night !—in sheets dried on a sweetbriar hedge, and laid in lavender, on a bed soft as down. People enjoyed soft beds in those days : now they are accustomed to prefer hard ones. For my part, I used to think it quite enchanting to sink (at Christmas) into a mass of feathers that all but closed over me, and lie blinking at the unusual luxury of a wood-fire smouldering on the hearth. My mother had the impression that my grandmother used to let her spare beds get damp : however, they never materially hurt any of us, though we certainly often had

tremendously bad colds. But grandmamma always said we caught them on the journey, and told us how dangerous it was to let down the coach-window.

Then, the next morning grandpapa would say, "Come, young ladies, it will do you no harm to take three runs round the garden with me before breakfast," and start off in advance, clapping his arms across the chest. Then, when we came panting into the breakfast-room, grandmamma would say, "Bless the girls! what colours!" and nudge my aunt to look at us. Continually during breakfast-time, she would ejaculate, "How they have shot up, to be sure! Well, time slips away;" and, directly after breakfast, my grandfather would brush up his hat, tell us to put on our bonnets (*bunnets* he always called them), clip us under his arm, and trot off to exhibit us to Mrs. Cole, or Mrs. Leftwych, or Mrs. Price. Everybody

knew and respected my grandfather: it was not that he was rich; it was not that he was eminent or powerful in any one direction, except in the way of manner and character. The first was charming; the latter, first-rate. Kissing his hand, or nodding, or gracefully bowing, or gaily smiling, to one and another as he passed along the street, many were the friendly though transient feelings he awakened.
“Mr. Price, good day to you. This is my grand-daughter, sir !”

“Indeed! Upon my word, sir, she seems a very nice young lady.”

This used to make us feel rather foolish, and wish grandpapa would move on; while he, quite unaware of our self-consciousness, would linger to have a few more words with Mr. Price on affairs social and domestic.

This worthy couple are now dead: nay, they had long been dead when I and my sisters sat

in their old places revolving the scheme of opening a school. As Jacintha and I advanced in womanhood, affairs became less pleasant at home: my father became too much of a stranger in it. A cloud fell over the house; it could not be altogether concealed from grandpapa and grandmamma, who became very unhappy about it: then there was a great deal of letter-writing; too much of it, I often thought; and yet, how could consolation be sought or sympathy expressed but by letter? No, we had great need to be thankful for the general post; and were so in our hearts. I am sure I used to watch for the postman turning the corner, and could settle to nothing till I saw him; and then, if he had nothing for us, and went by, I sometimes turned quite faint. Occasionally he used to catch my eye, many doors off, and shake his head.

My grandfather's and grandmother's chief

resource for us was having us down to stay with them. But union is strength, and we did not much like to divide. My mother's post was clearly at home ; I was much needed by her ; and as for Jacintha and Marian, they became wretched if they were long absent from us. However, we did go to Bayford each in turn, too : they were getting in years, and we felt it was due to such kind relatives and protectors. Besides, we really liked being with them, though each enjoyed herself in a different way.

Grandmamma and grandpapa—I smile while I write it—had the notion that I was a very superior woman : they told people so ; I have overheard them whisper it, and say I was very clever indeed, quite a genius ; it was a pity everybody did not know it ; nobody would guess what was in me, I was so retiring ; and the dearest girl ! so fond of home, &c. &c. &c.

It was a sad reflection to poor grandmamma that your very superior people are often mightily behindhand in very commonplace acquirements, and her grand aim was to endue me with such a measure of these as that I should be quite perfection. Consequently, there was nothing she liked better than to be closeted with me in a little sanctum of her own, where were sugar and spice and all that's nice, and to say, “Isabel, my dear, there is nothing in what I am going to show you that the most delicate lady may not do without even soiling her fingers, if she be but commonly careful;” and then proceed to initiate me into the mysteries of a ratifia pudding, or hunter’s pudding, or cheesecake, or a Chantilly basket; Hawkins having to trot up and down all the while with plates, cups, spoons, eggs, milk, cream, and undergo to the full as much trouble as if she had made the article outright.

Jacintha was more Aunt Christy's companion. Both of them were rather fond of dress and parties ; and Aunt Christy, who was conscious, perhaps, of not being very much in request herself, except for better qualities than those that mainly embellish evening parties, was pleased to take out with her a niece so handsome and agreeable as Jacintha, gifted with a beautiful and cultivated voice.

Marian had ways of her own for amusing herself there. There were certain very secret and mysterious essays in authorship, original design, and musical composition, that she could carry out nowhere so free from molestation as in the dear old house. Marian could have been a first-rate genius in almost every department, had her capabilities been properly cultivated. And as it was, the creative, inventive faculty, was continually manifesting itself, and breaking out in various little

attempts, that sometimes won the admiration, sometimes the laughter, of the domestic hearth ; at which she was, in the one case, innocently elated, in the other, rather sore. But her mortification always found an outlet in some funny speech ; for Marian *could* not be pettish or ill-tempered. As for music, she would really improvise grandly, when she thought nobody within hearing, which my mother and I have sometimes wickedly contrived to be. But, if asked or desired to improvise in our presence, she would say, “Oh, very well,” and after a grand crash on the keys, sing off an extempore travestie of the most amusing description, of one of Jacintha’s fine Italian bravuras,—“*Ombrà adorata*,” for instance,—till my mother and I were in fits of laughter, and Jacintha would start up and give her a good shaking. Before company Marian’s acquirements were shut up as closely as a rose-

bud unblown. She would not launch out in this way even to John, though both he and my father appreciated musical genius. These little snatches of country life revived us, even after my dear grandfather and grandmother were dead, and poor Aunt Christy was very glad of a companion. She did not *depend* on one, however, but bustled on manfully by herself, coming up to town once or twice a year.

Suddenly she sickened, and was carried off by a malady that must have been of long standing, though the sturdy little woman had never succumbed, nor made mention of it. Poor Aunt Christy !

Then the Poplar House came to my mother, and after her death, to her daughters. My father was glad to send us all down to it ; change of air for my mother was the plea ; and certainly, if any air or any place could have

restored her this would. But she languished, and at length died; of water on the chest it was professionally said.

My father was very kind to us after that. And then we lost sight of him again, always on plea of “business, business.” Sometimes he answered our letters; often not. People began to be shy of inquiring after him of us, and to think it best to ignore his existence.

But they could not at last; because it was publicly known that he had suddenly left the kingdom in a disgraceful manner. John was now junior partner in a respectable mercantile house, and led a respectable but somewhat selfish bachelor life, paying our allowances regularly, generally coupled with a letter of rather unnecessary advice. John, at this momentous crisis, was in the Channel Islands, and detained by contrary winds. We could not even get a letter to him. It was very well, therefore, for Marian to say,—“What

will John think, I wonder?" and quite impossible for any one to answer her by saying *what* he would think: though we had our apprehensions that he would think differently from ourselves. John had good and generous qualities, though they were somewhat smothered by his business life. For my part, I thought it just as likely he would befriend us as not; and say we must not think of a school, or anything of the sort—*he* would represent my father, and make provision for us all if we would but be economical, and keep together, and preserve, as far as in us lay, the respectability of "the family." I confess that this consoled me when I went to bed that night; and that, the more I lay awake and thought it over, the more likely it appeared. I did not in the least know what John's actual money-worth was; but estimated it, in a general way, at "something considerable."

CHAPTER III.

When gathering clouds around we view,
And days are dark, and friends are few,
On Him we'll lean, who, not in vain,
Experienced every human pain.
He sees our griefs, allays our fears,
And counts and treasures up our tears.

GRANT.

THE next morning, my little wheel-chair
was brought to the door.

I have forgotten to say, that I was crippled
in the hip-joint. It was owing to an accident.
One day, I was walking beside this very chair,
with my dear mother in it, when an overdriven
ox came racing down the street, and so frightened
the boy who was drawing the chair, that
he hauled it against a door-step, and overturned

it and my poor mother upon me. I, aiming to save her (which I did), got a hurt which, I suppose, will last all my life.

Dressed in my best mourning, therefore, I sallied forth in state, drawn by the redoubtable Hawkins, to call on Mrs. Meade. Things look different in the morning light from what they did overnight: the shadows fall all the other way. I remember spoiling a pencil sketch by forgetting this. It is curious, too, that we should wake with different impressions from those with which we fell asleep; especially if we have not, consciously, been dreaming: but so it is. I had fallen asleep sanguine; I awoke sober, serious, and rather depressed.

I now felt a presentiment that John would *not* help us, contenting himself with a few kind speeches; and that a school we should keep, and find it very up-hill work. But I kept these presentiments to myself; because my sisters

might have *their* presentiments too, and they seemed to be of a more cheerful description. Jacintha's smiles predominated over her sighs, as she prepared for her visit to her favourite friend; and Marian talked like a sage and a saint.

Jacintha's choice of an intimate, it must be told, was not accordant with my judgment. Mrs. Forsyth had been known to me in her unmarried days, though not *well* known till long after I had fancied myself possessed of her character. She came once to pay us a long visit, when we lived near London. We were friends when she came into the house; we were not friends when she went out of it. Neither were we foes; we were simply acquaintance. I do not think it necessary to fall into rages at every fresh instance of hollowness, weakness, or treachery; but friendship is a sacred thing, and I cannot entertain or profess it for any one

whom I find dangerously weak, or hollow, or treacherous.

Jacintha's experience of her had not been mine, and there was no need to rob her of a friend, because I had lost one. Mrs. Forsyth gave very nice little music-parties, and Jacintha's voice was in request at them, so that the intercourse was pleasant to both.

As for Marian's crony, Mrs. Christmas, she was, emphatically, "a good old body," and nothing more. If a person were but good, Marian never considered their worldly insignificance : her thoughts were not of *theirs*, but of *them*.

Well,—*I* thought myself far more discerning in the choice of a counsellor and confidant than either of my sisters ; and I think so still. Nevertheless, my heart was heavy as Hawkins jolted me along ; and when I reached Mrs. Meade's large, quiet old mansion, which stood within a paved court, at the other end of

the town, I was as tired and depressed as could be.

She was painting a primrose from nature when I went in. Though fifty years of age, she kept up her acquirements—not for display, but from pure love of their exercise. It was not often that I mustered energy to reach her; consequently, as her own health was delicate, we had not met for some time, and she heard me announced with surprise. She put down her brush in the middle of a wash, without minding a hard line, hastened to me and affectionately kissed me, and led me to a chair: then asked, with kind solicitude, how I was.

The Meades were in a superior position to our own, and did not visit in the same circle. Hence we saw less of them than we should otherwise have done; and though there was no pride in Mrs. Meade, and I felt a kind of

instinctive persuasion that we were kindred souls, Jacintha, though invited to some of their grand parties, was a little afraid of them. This feeling, in the present instance, was experienced by myself; I knew not how to begin, and, after answering kind inquiries concerning our health, a pause ensued.

I said, “I fear you must think it very odd I should call so early.”

“Oh, no,” said she kindly, “I am glad you have done so; because, later in the day, you might not have found me at home.”

“And I particularly wished to find you at home,—and disengaged,” said I, after another effort.

“I am *quite* disengaged,” said she. “What is there I can do for you?”

My throat swelled. I said, “Perhaps you will be kind enough to give me a little advice.”

“Oh, yes,” said she cheerfully, “people are

generally ready to do that : the only unreadiness they show is in taking it—not such people as you, though," added she, seeing my lip quiver.

"We are placed in rather trying circumstances, just now," said I; "and we don't see our way quite clearly."

"I am sure, then, I will help you, if I can," said Mrs. Meade. "What is it?"

"That's just what I find it so hard to tell you!" said I: a tear rolled down my cheek, and I could not at that moment get out another word.

"Take time, take time," said she softly, and pressing my hand in hers.

"My father—" began I, and stopped.

"We are great troubles to our fathers, sometimes," said she, with a little smile and a sigh, "and our fathers are sometimes trials to us. Mine, you know, was quite out of his mind long before he died."

"That was a heavy affliction," said I.
"Perhaps you may not consider mine so heavy,
but yet I feel—"

"That the burthen of it is just now beyond
your strength. Well, a burthen is often found
too heavy for one, that is easily carried by
two; and who knows but that before we part,
I may help you to carry yours before God—
and there leave it?"

Oh what a comforter that woman was! There was something in her tone, in her look, in her known character for sympathy and piety; but there was something in the words and thoughts themselves that contained good.

I asked her if she knew what my father had done. To my great surprise she did not: for I had fancied it must be known to all the world—at any rate, to our little world, in the length and breadth of it. But she assured me it was otherwise, and that people often give

themselves unnecessary sorrow by fancying family scandals circulated much more widely than is the case. "And even when they do circulate," she added, "how often people live them down!"

So then my tongue was unloosed; and I told her, quite composedly, all that had happened—a tear now and then straying down my cheek.

She was greatly moved: I saw her eyelids quiver with emotion. She took my hand, kissed me, and sat quite quiet a little while.

"This is a crisis in your affairs," said she, at length. "It is difficult to see plainly how to act. It seems to call for reference to a higher Power. Would you like to unite with me in prayer?"

"Beyond all things!" I exclaimed. On which she rose, locked the drawing-room door, knelt down, and uttered a most fervent and

suitable prayer—I kneeling too, and softly repeating every word of it after her. It seemed to me that God, at that moment, knit our two hearts in one.

After that we talked the subject over quite calmly. I laid before her the exact state of our finances, without any reserves: she agreed with me, that unless John undertook to provide for us, we must do something for ourselves, and she thought a school would have many advantages, because it would enable us to keep together. She thought there was a very good opening for one where we were; that our house was well adapted for the purpose; that our characters and talents were such as promised success, and that she should very likely be able to procure us two or three pupils.

When she had said this, she unlocked the door, left the room, and presently returned

with a little salver, on which were a glass of calf's-foot jelly and a meringue.

"You really must take this," said she cordially: "we are going to have a little party to-night (not of persons your sisters know or would care for, or I should have asked them), and our cook makes very nice jelly, as I hope you will allow when you have tasted it."

The refreshment was acceptable, for, being in weak health, I required to be helped along with frequent little restoratives. When I had partaken of it, and heard some more of her cheering and christian words, I took leave of her quite heartened, and proceeded to call on Mrs. Cole. This was with Mrs. Meade's concurrence, because she thought our plan would not seem so wild and hopeless to my brother, if we had any definite information on the subject, to supply the place of experience. To Mrs. Cole's I went, in too busy thought to

attend much to the frequent jolts of my wheel-chair over the rough stones. I believe I was immersed in feeling rather than thought; I seemed to have been steeped in a warm bath of the milk of human kindness.

But the common air feels very cold when we step out of a warm bath; and so it did when I entered Mrs. Cole's chilly drawing-room, where the fire had but been hastily lighted when Hawkins rang the bell, and where I waited an awful length of time before Mrs. Cole sailed in, evidently in her best dress.

The room was in tip-top order, almost too clean and French-polished: not a thing out of place or in use. Everything looked stuck-up, like the reception-room of an old-fashioned schoolmistress.

My grandfather and grandmother had not been intimate with Mrs. Meade, whom they considered rather high and too serious; but

many a cheerful rubber had they played with Mrs. Cole, who felt flattered by their cordiality, and reciprocated every kindness. She would have been equally sociable with us ; but Jacintha—and, I am afraid, I—drew back, and treated her rather distantly. We did not think an acquaintanceship with her would be quite in accordance with good taste. I don't feel quite sure, now, that our withdrawal from it was.

Be that as it might, directly she could do anything for us, you see, I went to her ; which showed an instinctive perception that there was something worth having in her, after all. But, when she sailed in, she looked by no means overpowered by the honour of my call, and sat up very stiff and stately, looking as much as to say, “To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit ?”

I knew this would not do at all. If any

coolness existed between us, I should get no good out of her; and I was determined to derive some good from her if I could. So I said—

“Mrs. Cole, ill news travels fast, and perhaps you have heard some of us. Have you?”

“No,” said she, pricking up her ears and looking excited. “What is it?”

Then I told her. She was very much surprised, and said she was very sorry too. I think she was, though not like Mrs. Meade. It was humane, not sympathetic pity.

“Dear me, dear me, this is very sad,” said she, stroking down her nice silk dress. “At your time of life, my dear madam, and in weak health, too, you ought to have nothing to harass you. And then there’s Miss Jacintha not married yet, though a very fine woman; and Miss Marian coming on, too. Dear me, dear me!”

“Mrs. Cole,” said I, “we are not going to make unreasonable demands on the compassion of our friends, but to put our own shoulders to the wheel.”

“That’s right, my dear ma’am; but in what way?”

“Well, we have been talking it over among ourselves, and certainly the most tempting plan seems to be that of which you, my dear Mrs. Cole, have had no mean experience—namely, opening a school.”

“A school!” cried Mrs. Cole, reddening up: “surely that would be the last thing Miss Jacintha would consent to! She always appeared to me to entertain the utmost contempt for even successful heads of such establishments retired on their fortunes!”

“I am sure I am very sorry if Jacintha’s manner has ever expressed this,” said I, hastily, knowing very well that she cherished the feeling.

"Oh, let that pass, my dear madam—if offence was meant, none was taken, I can assure you!" replied Mrs. Cole, drawing up her short neck very majestically. "Old Mr. and Mrs. Edmonstone were very worthy people—exceedingly so; and I had a great regard for them, and would have had pleasure in being attentive to their grand-daughters, had the feeling been mutual. As it is, I can only wish them every success!—every success!"

"That is most kind and cordial of you," said I, "and I am sure that my dear grandfather, were he alive, would rejoice to hear you say so, and feel every kindness to us as done to himself."

"Very probably he would, Miss Middlemass; for he was a very excellent man, and quite the gentleman. Many a rubber have we played together."

"And very fond he was of getting you for

his partner, Mrs. Cole," said I ; "for he always said you knew how to make the best of a good hand."

" Well, that was truly said, and handsomely said," returned Mrs. Cole, complacently ; " quite like one of his kind speeches. This business of yours, my dear madam, would have vexed him sadly."

" There can be no doubt of that," said I. "I am glad he has been spared it; but yet, had he been alive, we should neither have wanted a protector nor a home."

" That's true enough," said Mrs. Cole ; "but now that he is no more, and your father has behaved so shamefully badly, your brother, I should say, is your natural guardian and protector."

" True," said I, "but we do not like to be burthensome to him if we can provide for ourselves. There will be nothing to blush for

in that, I think. And if any of our summer-day friends incline to drop us in our adversity, we can very well spare them," said I, with spirit.

"Right, right! I quite agree with you, Miss Middlemass," said Mrs. Cole, waxing cordial; "and anything I can do, I am sure, in the way of recommendation and patronage, I shall be most happy to volunteer, for the sake of good old Mr. Edmonstone. It will, doubtless, go much against the grain with Miss Jacintha."

"We must all make the best of it," said I; "and the patronage and recommendation you speak of, will be highly valuable and gratefully received. Indeed, some practical details from you, on a subject of which I profess myself lamentably ignorant, will be most acceptable to me."

"Well, then, my dear Miss Middlemass,"

said Mrs. Cole, warmly, and drawing her chair closer to me as she spoke, "let us go into it thoroughly at once. I can tell you all the routine, all the trials, all the difficulties, from first to last. You'll find it a precious worry, I can tell you. Under the most auspicious circumstances, scholastic tuition is a very great plague; and, ten chances to one, you won't make it answer. You see you've had no experience, my dear ma'am!—not even having been at school yourself. Things are carried on as differently in a private family, from what they are in a large establishment, as it is possible to conceive. Oh, if you knew what my responsibilities have been! *and* anxieties! *and* trials! I am sure you would be ready to give it up in despair!"

And then she began her details, which were very wordy, very desultory, and, in many respects, very disheartening. One thing was

certain, however,—she had retired on a good fortune. But, then, as she said, she had had a good training, good connections, and good luck. We *might* have the last,—we certainly had not had the first,—and it remained to be proved what our connections would do for us.

With her permission, I took out my tablets. Warming with her subject, she gave me the most useful details of the daily minutiae of housekeeping for a large school, the consumption of food, the arrangements with tradespeople and laundresses. We had a good laundry and mangle, and she advised me to have a laundry-maid in the house. As she was reputed to have kept a liberal establishment, I thought many of her arrangements rather mean, and probably demurred a little at them in my countenance, for she quickly said—

“*Not* mean — only close: and you *must*

shave close if you keep a school and make it answer.”

I bowed, and went on with my notes. Then came the schoolroom routine—teachers, masters. Her account now became narrative instead of didactic, and my pencil was laid aside. My hair stood on end (metaphorically) at her relations of refractory, nay, depraved pupils, artful teachers, and no less wicked masters. Her whole story seemed founded on the text, “There is not one good, no, not one.” My heart sank when I thought of coping with such finished specimens of villainy; and when Mrs. Cole triumphantly related how she had suspected this and foiled that, and unmasked one and disgraced another, I felt that if I were to play the same part, however successfully, I should be lowered in my own eyes; and as for my sisters, it was not to be thought of for a moment.

I suppose my face grew longer and longer ; for she checked herself, and said, heaving an apologetic sigh—

“ Yes, my dear ma’am, it’s all very sad and very shocking ; but, then, there’s the comfort that it does not all come on us at once. All these melancholy cases I have been running over, only occurred during a long course of years, at considerable intervals from one another ; and though none but such an established character as mine could have survived the obloquy occasioned by Miss Curlew, nor any ingenuity, much short of supernatural, have circumvented Monsieur Bougie, yet I never knew of any similar cases *quite* as bad ; and as for the daily worry and wear, why that you must expect.”

At this instant, the time-piece struck two. She asked me to lunch with her, but I declined, with thanks, assuring her we dined

early, and apologising for having trespassed on her time and kindness so unmercifully. She said with great friendliness, that it was of no consequence, heartily wished me success, promised to do for us anything she could, and, to wind up all, sent her compliments and condolences to Miss Jacintha.

CHAPTER IV.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou hast taught,
That at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
And on its sounding anvil shaped,
Each burning deed and thought.

LONGFELLOW.

MY mind was so busy, that the way home appeared short. On reaching the house I was sensible of very great fatigue, and felt I must recruit and repose myself. I had no opportunity of doing so, however, for Jacintha met me at the drawing-room door with a woe-begone face, and was too much pre-occupied with her own experiences of the morning to think either of my details or my fatigue.

"Oh, this plan will never do, Isabella," said she, as soon as I dropped on the sofa; "Mrs. Forsyth says it will *never* do."

"Wait a little," said I, hastily giving Hawkins my bonnet, shawl, and gloves to carry away. "Now, what is it?"

Meanwhile, Marian, radiant with smiles, had looked in on us: had heard Jacintha's discouraging exclamation, and seen my jaded looks. Hastily saying, "How tired Isabella is!" she had withdrawn, followed by Hawkins.

"Now then, what is it?" said I. And Jacintha poured out her woes. Mrs. Forsyth had been quite thunderstruck: Mrs. Forsyth was quite against it, and sure it would not do at all. We were not the sort of people to understand such a thing or make it answer; we should lose caste for nothing, forfeit our position, lose old friends, make no new ones, get

into debt, difficulty, and trouble. And large tears rolled down Jacintha's cheeks.

"Trust me for not getting into debt," said I. "Mrs. Forsyth may drop us, but I am sure no real friends will; and whatever difficulties and trouble we may meet with (we shall be sure of *them*, whatever course we adopt,) we shall never incur disgrace."

"What Isabella says is quite true," said Marian, coming in with a cup of excellent arrowroot for me: "you *must* have this, Isabella; you require it, after your unusual exertions. Jacintha, you really must not take on this way, or you'll be the diet of worms!"

This set Jacintha off laughing; and Marian eagerly continued, "I've got a pupil!"

"*You*, you chit," cried Jacintha, amazed.

"Yes! Fanny Ward!"

Jacintha's countenance fell: "Only a draper's daughter," said she.

"Yes, but he's a very good man, and a rich one too; and the best of it is that he will let me have her at once, Jacintha, to practise upon; just because he says he feels a kindness for me,—us, I mean,—and will pay us full terms from the very day she comes (that's to-morrow), without waiting for the school opening. And though she is to be paid for as a boarder, she is only to be a day-scholar till we begin in earnest, so that she will not be in the way; and, whether the school comes to anything or not, no harm will be done, and I shall be getting my hand in nicely."

"I never heard such a thing in my life!" said Jacintha, breathlessly.

"This comes, Marian, of your saving Fanny Ward from being run over," cried I, "when she could scarcely walk alone, and you yourself were quite a child."

"I'd forgotten that," said Marian. "Oh no;

it was so long ago, *he* must have forgotten it too."

I was convinced he had not; though I would not say so again. At any rate, I was sure our Heavenly Father had borne it in mind.

"Well," cried Jacintha, with spirit, "this revives me. I feel I can go on again. At the same time, tradesmen's daughters, as Mrs. Forsyth expressly said, are not—"

"Dinner's on table, ma'am," said Hawkins.

The announcement was opportune. It put an end to an anxious subject when we were all rather overwrought; and a good dinner put us in a condition to resume it far more cheerfully. I insisted on Jacintha's taking a glass of wine, though I was a water-drinker myself; and her views of affairs in general before and after dinner varied as much as mine had done night and morning.

After dinner, we drew round the fire, dis-

posed to be very confidential ; Jacintha peeling walnuts.

“ Well,” said I, “ suppose we each tell our stories, like people in a book. Marian, you begin, you are the youngest.”

“ Well,” said Marian, “ I went straight to that darling old Mrs. Christmas, whom I shall love as long as I live. She was looking over some bits of old yellow lace. She called me ‘ my dear,’ took my hand in both her own, made me sit down next the fire, and was *so* kind. I,—I told her all about it and the good old soul cried, and kissed me, and talked over everything ; and, when she heard we meant to keep a school, ‘ That will be *sure* to answer ! ’ cried she ; ‘ tell your dear good sisters to have *no* fears ; they will be *sure* to make it answer.’ And oh, Isabella and Jacintha !—she praised both of you so much. ‘ Whatever you do,’ said she, ‘ will prosper, for the blessing of the Lord

will be on you ! You've been kind to other people in their troubles, and now other people will be kind to you. So clever as Miss Jacintha is, and such a superior woman as Miss Middlemass is, people will delight in sending their daughters to you, in the full confidence you will do the best for them you can : and when they find (as I'm sure they will find) what a very superior education you give them, why, there'll be quite a competition ! and you'll be known all over the country ! you will retire on handsome fortunes, and enjoy yourselves all the remainder of your days !—And, my dear,—if you should meanwhile ever be pressed for a little ready money, apply to me, for ten, for twenty, or for thirty pounds, according as you want it. *More* than that I don't keep in the house, and must send to the bank for ; but, as far as that goes, you may always apply to me without the least scruple, because I always have it by me.' ”

"To think of that!" said Jacintha. "Good old soul! It really was very kind of her."

"Very kind indeed," said I. "Go on, Marian."

"So then," said Marian, "she sent over for Mr. Ward, who, you know, is her son-in-law; and, while he was being fetched, she turned over in her mind all the people she could think of who might help us to pupils. Mr. Ward came over at once, though it was close on his dinner-hour. 'Sam,' said she, 'the Miss Middlemasses, poor dears! are just now in family affliction—which we need not enter upon at present; and they have resolved to open a school. Could not you send them Fanny?' 'Surely I could,' said Mr. Ward, with his eyes as bright as beads, 'if Miss Marian will but make her like herself' (which was only his way of putting it, you know). 'I would give half the money I have realized,' continued he,

cordially, ‘if you would turn her out just such another as you are: and, since I know that cannot be, I shall esteem it a privilege to pay the best terms, whatever they are, for you to make the best of her you can.’”

“Very handsome indeed,” said Jacintha.
“I only wish—”

“So, then,” pursued Marian, “I told him nothing was settled yet, and that the whole scheme, even, might come to the ground; but that, as it might *not*, I should be very glad to acquire a little practice without loss of time, and should wish to begin lessons with Fanny at once, to which he cheerfully consented, saying she would be better here than at home.”

“Well,” said Jacintha, “it seems a curious plan; but you have arranged it all now, and could not very well disappoint those who have behaved so kindly. I only wish the man were not—”

"Now, Jacintha, for your story," said I, "for I am impatient to come to my own."

"Oh, you may tell yours first," said Jacintha. "In fact, I've none to tell."

So then I spoke warmly, but in general terms, of Mrs. Meade's kindness and sympathy; and then went on to Mrs. Cole. They were both very much interested in my details.

"Come, this is practical," said Jacintha, at last. "I begin, for the first time, to see our way clearly. As for difficulties, I don't care a straw for them; in fact, I shall rather like them. There will be glory in overcoming them."

"I would rather not have any," said I; "but I do not fear to face them."

"Nor I," said Marian. "Now I may go to work with pen and paper in real earnest. All my estimates of last night are good for nothing. Let me put everything down, Isabella, while you have it so clearly in your head."

I thought it a good plan; and dictated to her, resting on my sofa, while Jacintha listened and ate her walnuts, sometimes making a remark.

Our united opinion was, that Mrs. Cole had afforded us an admirable skeleton of school routine, but that it was too much on the old narrow-minded system; that we might with advantage adhere to the general outline without crippling ourselves by the individual details; and that if we did but turn out nice, intelligent, pure-minded, well instructed girls, the method of doing so might be safely entrusted to our own tastes and abilities. This was a very satisfactory arrangement to us all; because each had little crotchets of our own, which we had long been fond of enlarging upon in theory, which we should now have the opportunity of putting into practice; and each was generously ready to allow her neigh-

bours their hobby if she had the free exercise of hers.

It was getting quite dusk, and Marian was obliged to give up writing, while Jacintha drew the crimson curtains across the windows and stirred the fire, but did not ring for candles.

“I wonder—” Marian was beginning, when the house-bell was rung loudly. We exchanged a quick look in silence.

The next minute the door opened, and a tall figure stood in the doorway, draped in a large blue travelling cloak, flung over one shoulder.

“It’s John! I knew it was!” cried Marian, starting up.

He hastily closed the door, advanced, embraced each of us with emotion, and then sat down and covered his face with his hands.

Poor John! We were all very much touched.

"This is a bad business," said he, drying his eyes. "My poor sisters! What a blow this must have been to you! And *I* away! —Shocking! shocking!"

"It must have been a great shock to *you*," said I.

"Oh, terrible, terrible!" said he. "I was quite unprepared for it. I could not have thought it of the old gentleman."

John, up to this time, had always been accustomed to speak of my father with outward respect, though now and then he would lightly term him the "governor;" but now he sunk him at once and for a permanence, in his vocabulary, into "the old gentleman."

"Well, my poor sisters," said he, clearing his throat, "what do you mean to do?"

"We have been thinking it over, John," said I, "and we do not mean to be burthen-some to *you*."

"As for that," said he, shrugging his shoulders, "I must take what is sent me; for you can't possibly live on a hundred and fifty pounds a year, I'm afraid."

"No," said I, "I don't think we could."

"At any rate, not in this house," said he, looking about him; "nor in the way I should wish my sisters to live. No; this poor old house, I fear, must go. I was thinking about it on my way down. It will let, I should think, for a hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"Oh dear no, John, not even if we went to the expense of putting it into what auctioneers and appraisers call 'good, tenantable repair.' The old furniture looks very well, all in its place, but if pulled out of it would fetch next to nothing of a broker, while the old walls, window-frames, and floors would look miserable. Even Mr. Duke's house, which, you know, is better and more modern than this, only lets for a hundred a year."

“But might not you let this house furnished, as it stands?” said John, after a moment’s pause—“Say at eight guineas a week.”

“Oh, who would give it, John? This is not a fashionable watering-place: it has not a single attraction for strangers: there are no mineral waters, no show-houses—it is not one of those places that have what is called their *season*.¹⁵”

“That’s true,” said John, ruefully; “I wish it were. Then, I suppose the best plan will be to sell the old place and take a smaller. You might add something to your income thus.”

Jacintha was going hastily to answer; but I gave her a little look, and continued to be the spokeswoman.

“Say we made it up two hundred pounds,” said I, “or a little over—that, with house-

rent and taxes deducted from it, would not leave us much."

"But, my dear Isabella, what *do* you want?" cried John, hastily. "What is the smallest sum you think you *can* live upon? Three hundred a year? Very well: turn over this old house and its belongings to me to make the best of, and I will guarantee you the three hundred a year, your allowances inclusive."

I am now inclined to think this was a very kind offer of John's; it was one that, I believe, we should have been grateful for, when our position first broke upon us, and before we thought of the school. But, at the time it was made, we did not feel it so; I saw Jacintha's head jerk, and even the gentle Marian look injured. We thought John was going to obtain the credit of being very generous to us, and the power of being very arbitrary with us, at an almost nominal price.

“No, no, my dear John,” said I, “this is a misfortune which you share in common with us all, and we have quite determined not to be burthensome to you.”

“How can you help it?” said he, knitting his brows a little.

“By doing something for ourselves.”

“What can you do?”

“Keep a school.”

“Not to be thought of!” cried he, with indignation and disgust. “*My* sisters keep a school!”

“But, John—” cried Jacintha, hotly.

“But, John,” said Marian, winningly, and twining her arm within his as she looked up into his face, “just hear Isabella out. You cannot think how nicely she has arranged it all. Just hear her.”

“What can any of you know of school-keeping?” said he, very gruffly. “There is

not a subject on which you are, all of you, more profoundly ignorant."

"We *were* so, I grant you," said I, "and we are wholly without experience; but, since it has become a matter of consideration among us, I have made it my duty to seek practical information of a lady experienced in tuition, who has retired on a good fortune."

"Humph!" said John, still very gloomy.
"And what does she say?"

"She says," replied I, "that this house is better adapted for a school than for any other purpose;" and I gave him a general outline of our scheme, embellished with sundry business-like statistics; not a little encouraged by the approval which beamed, almost too visibly, in my sisters' eyes.

John was convinced. He held out awhile; and demurred about one thing and another; but gradually was overcome by argument and persuasion, and yielded the point very hand-

somely. Tea *à la fourchette* was introduced forthwith for his refreshment ; he enjoyed the meal, praised everything, told Hawkins she grew younger every year, complimented Jacintha on her good looks, and had many a pleasant word for me and Marian.

Altogether, it was a very grateful conclusion of a trying day. After tea, we again gathered round the fire, and discussed in a very harmonious, leisurely way, all that we had previously spoken of in haste and emotion ; recapitulating what we had felt, and what we had feared, and what we had suspected, with a great deal more verbosity than would be tolerable, except in a sympathizing family circle. At length, when we seemed completely to have exhausted the subject, there was a pause ; and then John said—

“ I’m going to surprise you all. What do you think ? I’m going to be married ! ”

It *did* surprise us. I suppose announce-

ments of this kind generally do. We were wholly unprepared for it. What with his whist-clubs, his madrigal-clubs, his white-bait dinners, his drives in Hyde Park, &c., we had learnt to consider him a confirmed bachelor. We did not even know enough of his acquaintance to be able to conjecture who the lady might be; and when he added, "To Miss Laura Highworth," we were little wiser than before. Of course it was an interesting subject to him—and it was an interesting subject to us; so that he was secure of three good listeners while he expatiated on the family, fortune, and personal attractions of the happy fair. In spite of his vivid colouring, which rather dazzled us at first, she did not appear to be so formidably wealthy or well-born as to have a right to consider it a scandal that her husband's sisters should keep a school; on the contrary, John talked of the expenses of mar-

ried life and liberal housekeeping in a depreciating tone, that made me think he was secretly glad to be well quit of the three hundred a year guarantee, after having offered it freely and handsomely. Each party was satisfied with their own bargain, and tolerably satisfied with one another. Some of Miss Laura Highworth's connexions, we afterwards found, were not only commercial, but in trade. This accounted for his merely saying, "Pooh, pooh," to Jacintha's, "But, John, I think we ought from the first to exclude tradesmen's daughters."

"England is a nation of shopkeepers," said he. "It might not do, even for *us*, to trace our pedigree back too far: at any rate, I am not aware we can carry it beyond our great-grandfather!"

CHAPTER V.

We sat and talked, until the night,
Descending, filled the little room ;
Our faces faded from the sight,
Our voices only broke the gloom.
We spoke of many a vanished scene,
Of what we once had thought and said ;
Of what had been, and might have been,
And who was changed, and who was dead.

LONGFELLOW.

HOW tired I was that night ! I had a sad palpitation of the heart after I got to bed, and feared I must ring some one up ; but had just resolution enough to forbear. Of course, I was glad of it, when the palpitation had passed off ; and there is always a grand satisfaction at some notable piece of life's business being achieved, which even pain and

weariness cannot deprive us of. It had been a memorable day to us all.

John slept in the house, but took leave of us before we departed for the night. He was to start at six o'clock in the mail, and I knew I could not with prudence rise so early to see him off. Marian, however, promised to do so; and Jacintha said something about it; but we all knew how to interpret speeches made by her overnight, about early rising in the morning.

Jacintha and I were just ready for breakfast when Marian returned, glowing with exercise, from walking with John to the "White Hart."

"Well," said we both, "you have seen him off!"

"Oh, yes," replied she, gaily; "he is gone off in very good spirits."

"He is satisfied, then, with our plan?" said Jacintha, anxiously.

“Well,” said Marian, dimpling, “he said something very improper about it.”

“What was it?” cried I.

“He said, ‘he feared we might find it a deuce of a worry.’”

Jacintha laughed.

“Very likely we may,” said she. “Oh, I shall not mind that. I feel equal to anything, now that John supports us. What a difference it makes! We were all ready enough to say, ‘Who cares for John?’ when we thought he would be against us; but now that he is for us, we find we care for him a good deal.”

“I think his approaching marriage has had a great effect upon him,” said Marian. “He says he is so thankful everything was settled before this blow occurred. It might have made all the difference.”

“I wonder what sort of a person she is,” said Jacintha. “One would like to know.”

"Oh, John has very good taste," said I; "and good judgment, too, when it is unbiassed."

Thus we chatted on, in high good-humour with him, ourselves, and one another, till breakfast was over.

After prayers, Jacintha retired to the drawing-room to write letters and draw up an advertisement. I remained in the dining-room, where we were presently joined by Fanny Ward. She was a nice, fair, frank-looking, well-grown girl of eleven. I confess I was curious to observe how Marian would begin with her, but feared my presence would be rather a restraint to both. I therefore made a show of rising to carry my work into the other room, saying, "I am afraid I shall be in the way if I stay here;" but Marian replied, "Oh, no, if *we* are not in *your* way;" and Fanny looked quite unconcerned. Down I sat, therefore, again.

“Now then, Fanny,” said Marian, seating herself beside her at the table, “first of all I must find out what you *can* do, that I may know what you cannot. Suppose we begin with writing. Here are pen, ink, and paper. Write down what I shall dictate,—

‘Merrily sang the monks of Ely,
When Canute the king was rowing thereby.’

“Do you know who was King Canute, Fanny?”

“No,” said Fanny. “He is not in my list of kings.”

“Because your list of kings, probably, begins with William the Conqueror. But there were many kings of England, Fanny, before he came to reign over us. Did you never hear of the Saxons?”

She had heard of them.

Marian gave a brief synopsis of the history

of England from the earliest times to the days of Canute, to which Fanny listened with mute attention. Then she looked at the writing.

“It is not very well done,” said Fanny.

“Never mind. What I wanted was to see your spelling.” (Ha! thought I.) “Where is Ely, Fanny?”

Fanny could not say.

“Ely is in Cambridgeshire. Open that atlas. Turn to the map of England. Find Cambridgeshire. Find Ely. Yes, there it is. There was a famous monastery there in the time of Canute. He, and Emma, his queen—go on writing—were very fond of going there to stay with the good monks. Do you know what monks are?”

“Yes.”

“One year, at the Festival of the Purification, the rivers and marshes were frozen

over, and the king's courtiers tried to dissuade him from going to keep the festival at Ely, telling him the ice would not bear him. 'Well,' said he, 'I do not think it can be so thin but that it will bear me, who am light and thin, if I go on foot; and I am resolved to try, if any one of you will but go first to show me the way.' None of the courtiers much relished this proposal; however, an Ely man, who stood by, and who was nicknamed Pudding, because he was so fat, cried, 'I'll go before you, my lord king, with all the pleasure in life!' 'Forward, then, man!' cried Canute, laughing; and they passed safely across, the courtiers, ashamed and frightened, picking their way after them. Then said the king, 'You, Pudding the fat, shall henceforth be Pudding the free, and your descendants and your lands shall be free for ever! So now, laugh and grow fatter!'"

"I like that story," said Fanny, when her

pen had hastily scribbled it to the conclusion.

“Of course,” said Marian, looking it over. “Ah, Fanny, here is some bad spelling this time. Correct *this*, and *this*, and *this*. That is right. Canute died in the year 1034. How long is that ago? Don’t do it in your head, but on paper. Don’t you know how? Subtract it from this present year. That is right. If the distance from York to Ely were a hundred and twenty miles, and Canute travelled from one to the other at the rate of thirty miles a day, how long would he be on the road?”

In this way, Marian went on, sounding the shallow depths of little Fanny’s knowledge in every imaginable direction, with a practical simplicity that to me was surprising and interesting. Jacintha entered in the midst, to speak to me; listened for a minute to what was going on, arched her eyebrows and gave

me a droll look, and went away. The two continued so indefatigably engaged in one thing after another, that at last I felt called on to say, "Well, now I think you have both done enough for the first morning, and Fanny had better take a run round the garden."

Both looked sorry; but the books were instantly cleared away, and Fanny, venturing to lay her hand on Marian's arm, said, "Won't you come too?" in so winning a way, that Marian instantly answered, "To be sure I will;" and was off with her the next moment.

"Dear me," said Jacintha, looking out at them from the window, "I am afraid Marian is permitting too much familiarity in that child. They are now having a game of *les graces*. And, if you observed, Fanny addressed her without saying 'ma'am.'"

"Yes," said I, "my dear Jacintha, this advertisement will do extremely well. We

must get Mr. Price to place it in a prominent position in our county paper. The circular, too, will do very well, I think, slightly abridged. By the way, I see you have adopted ‘the Misses Middlemass !’ ”

“ Yes ; ” reluctantly said Jacintha ; “ it would not do, you know, to start with questionable grammar. Do you think I have said too much, then, in the circular ? ”

“ Rather too much. I will correct it in pencil.”

“ Well,—yes—you have improved it. I will take it at once to Mr. Price, and find how much it will cost to have five hundred struck off.”

“ *Two* hundred. Suppose—nay, surely one hundred—”

“ Oh, that would be quite insufficient; don’t let us do things by halves.” And away went Jacintha, rather pleased at the idea of seeing herself in print.

She had scarcely gone, when there was a double knock; and Mr. Duncan was announced. He was a very handsome man, a married man of forty or thereabout; an opulent tea-dealer, and the first-cousin of our member. We were not on visiting terms.

After a few polite preliminaries, “I have called, Miss Middlemass,” said he, “in consequence of learning from my friend, Mrs. Meade, that you are intending to open a school. I cannot say how glad I shall be to avail myself of the opportunity of placing under your care my two little girls, who left their preparatory school at Brighton this Christmas, in consequence of an epidemic among the scholars. They have been at home ever since, and are getting a little undisciplined, but we do not wish them to return to Brighton. We should prefer having them nearer home. So that, if it meets with your approbation—”

"You are very kind, indeed!" said I warmly.

"Why," said he, hesitating a little, "I was not quite sure whether you would be too exclusive to admit the children of tradespeople; I, you know, am nothing but a tradesman."

"*You*, Mr. Duncan?"

"That's all," said he, with proud humility.

"You need have no misgivings," said I, "for we have already accepted Mr. Ward's little girl for a pupil."

"Oh," said he, with a little shade crossing his brow. And I saw directly that he looked down on Mr. Ward, though he would not have liked us to look down on himself.

"Mr. Ward is a highly respectable man," said he.

"And he has come forward so handsomely," said I, "that we could not well refuse."

"Well, then, after the Easter holidays (if you open so soon), we may look on the thing

as settled," said Mr. Duncan. "I shall leave my wife to make minor arrangements."

And after a little friendly chat, he went away. Then came Mrs. Meade. Her visit was a treat to Marian as well as myself; Fanny having gone home to dinner. She had scarcely left us, when Mrs. Cole called. She was very friendly indeed, though Jacintha might have felt her patronizing; but sympathy was just then so prized by me that I was not disposed to be fastidious.

The news of our project was beginning to creep out, though as yet it had spread but little. This gave us leisure to digest our plans. On the following Sunday, when I took my accustomed place in our large, square, high-backed pew, with its old oaken seats and faded green hassocks and curtains, I could not help sighing to think how soon its privacy would be invaded by a set of restless young spirits, my

watchfulness over whose demeanour would sadly detract from my devotion. The future trial enhanced the present privilege ; and most fervently did I pray for our strength and success : not forgetting to seek a special blessing on the young souls we were to educate for immortality.

Our advertisement had come out in the Saturday's county paper, consequently we were no longer private characters ; and we felt a sort of consciousness, as our eyes met those of other people, who, for aught we knew, had seen our names in the public print, and already canvassed our objects, motives, and the chances of our success. We could not settle to our Sunday reading that evening. Each had her book—Jacintha her favourite Fenelon, I my Leighton on St. Peter, and Marian her little morocco-bound Bible ; but we were continually falling into snatches of talk, or yielding to reverie.

"After all, it is a very high destiny," said Marian pensively, "to train the young."

"Certainly it is," said I. "It gives the bent to their future characters and lives."

"Then why are schoolmistresses slightly thought of?"

"Partly through the narrow-mindedness of others," said I, "and partly through their own, which prevents their taking a high view of their vocation."

"*I* mean to take a high view of it."

"So do I."

"By the bye," cried Jacintha abruptly, "we must have this room cleared out."

"Oh!—why?"

"Who ever heard of a schoolroom furnished in this way?"

"I really see no supreme good," said I, "in making girls more uncomfortable at school than they are at home. What is there here they

can spoil, or would wish or should be allowed to injure? and where is the moral advantage of carpetless, curtainless rooms? We are not going to bring up young Spartans, but young ladies; and surely, ladylike habits may best be cultivated amid the appliances of a lady's home?"

"That never struck me," said Jacintha reflectingly, "but I think you are right. How I wish I had put something about it in the prospectus! It would be almost worth while to have a new set struck off. It would give an air to the school, you see!"

"Oh no, there is no need to have a new set, nor to start with too much self-puffery. They are sealed and directed, now, ready to send off to-morrow."

At bedtime I perceived that Hawkins was troubled.

"You do not look well this evening," said I

to her, “I fear you have one of your bad headaches.”

“Oh no, ‘tis n’t that,” said she, applying the corner of her apron to her eye, “though my head does ache, ‘tis true. But I’ve heard something that *gri-eves* me! They do say, ma’am, below, that you and the ladies is going to keep a school.”

“Who say so?” inquired I hastily.

“Mr. Perkins, ma’am, cook’s father: he says he’s seen it in print. But, there! I told him I could not believe it.”

“It is true, however, my dear Hawkins, though I would not say anything to you about it sooner than I could help. We are all of a mind about it, Mr. John and all; and we feel it our duty, and hope for the blessing of God upon us in its performance. But if you, Hawkins, feel unequal to the stir and bustle of such an increased household as ours is likely to be,

I assure you that I shall not take it in the least amiss of you if you say you should prefer seeking a quieter place. At the same time, we will make it as easy as we can for you ; extra help, of course, we must have ; but you are so tried and faithful a servant, that I confess to you I shall feel, if you leave us, that we have sustained a heavy loss."

" Bless you, I'm not thinking of *going*!" cried Hawkins. "That *would* be a pretty piece of work ! Why, all you earned upstairs would be wasted in the kitchen ! No, no. I'm very sorry there's any occasion for such a thing ; but, since there is, why, all I can say is, I'll do the best for ye I can, as I've always done before !"

This was most heartening to me, as I had been sadly afraid of Hawkins taking alarm at untried labours : and I slept all the more quietly for the assurance of her allegiance.

The next day, the important circulars were issued ; and, from that moment, we felt that we had stepped forth from “the mild majesty of private life” into the busy, bustling, striving world. It seemed quite strange to us, when evening drew in, that the day had passed by even more quietly than usual. It was so with the next, and the next. Only Fanny Ward invaded our privacy. Then letters of condolence and inquiry began to arrive from friends, acquaintance, and strangers. Some promised to be useful to us ; others feared we should get into trouble ; and others offered impracticable or unpalatable advice. All this was ordinary enough. Then I found myself in correspondence with persons I had never seen, about details we had not yet decided on ourselves, and was obliged to be very careful not to commit myself. Mrs. Forsyth’s feelings were, doubtless, cruelly mangled by the

advertisement and circulars of persons on her visiting list ; but, when she found Mrs. Meade had taken us up, she began to think it would be good taste to do so to ; and she told Jacintha she was making strenuous exertions to procure us some very charming, aristocratic girls, who would give a stamp to the school. She inquired whether any pupils were yet secured ; but her countenance fell when she heard the names of Ward and Duncan ; and she hoped that we might not prove penny wise and pound foolish in accepting them at any price. A few days of silence intervened : then arrived three diminutive sheets of rose-tinted note-paper from Mrs. Forsyth to Jacintha. The mother of the charming, aristocratic girls could not think of their associating with tradesmen's daughters. Our school must be unstamped.

“ We may have taken a false step,” said I, thoughtfully, and returning Jacintha the letter.

“ It is impossible for us, as yet, to tell—I am no leveller of artificial distinctions ; but yet I *cannot* feel we have done wrong in availing ourselves of the kindness of Mr. Ward and Mr. Duncan.”

“ Time will show,” said Jacintha, gravely ; and she was evidently depressed during the remainder of the day.

Meanwhile, it would be difficult to decide whether Marian or Fanny Ward were working hardest or with the most zealous will. The progress they were making was prodigious—quite in an irregular way, as Jacintha justly enough observed : but still the amount and variety of knowledge Fanny was acquiring was something amazing.

One afternoon Mr. Ward called on me—his good-tempered face shining with pleasure.

“ I really cannot forbear intruding on you, Miss Middlemass,” said he, “ to express my

gratification at the progress my little girl is making. It's surprising ! ma'am—its perfectly surprising ! Mr. and Mrs. Duncan did us the favour of dining with us in a friendly way yesterday, and when they heard and saw what Fanny was, and what she could do, they were quite surprised and gratified. And it's not only her head-knowledge, ma'am, though that's something ;— but Miss Marian can impart Christianity, and gentleness, and good temper, and good behaviour ; and those are things, ma'am, that I, a plain man, think quite as much of as the use of the globes !”

It was very encouraging.

CHAPTER VI.

Uprouse ye then, my merry, merry, men,
For 'tis our *opening day* !

JOANNA BAILLIE.

THE grand, the important day, the opening day, arrived. How many times did I go into every room, look at each little white bed, see that everything was as it should be, and then return to my sofa, to remember something I had forgotten, and repeat my round !

Fanny Ward had arrived the previous evening, as an inmate,—a privilege for which she had been burning,—and already considered herself an established resident. This girl had conceived a strong affection for all of us, an intense love for Marian ; and it was difficult not to reciprocate it, and to fancy her some young

kinswoman, whose credit and interests were involved in the same concern. All the morning she was assisting in various little arrangements with the most pleasing alacrity, at everybody's call, running on messages, upstairs, downstairs, without the least obtrusiveness or fuss.

“Jacintha! where are my keys?”

“Here, Fanny! run with these keys to Miss Middlemass.”

“Fanny! Miss Marian is calling you.”

“Oh, Fanny, do help me to carry away all these old music-books. No! you can't carry them all, they are too heavy—I will help you.”

Fanny, however, triumphantly bore them off, and then returned for some other errand. Now and then, I saw her arm slip round Marian's waist. “The girls”—“the girls”—were frequently in her mouth.

Poplar House Academy. III

“Fanny, you must call them young ladies. And, remember, you must always henceforth say ‘ma’am,’ even to me.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Good girl. Not broadly, you know, but slightly, lightly.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“That’s it. You are going to be my tame elephant, you know, Fanny, and to teach the others how to fall into the right ways. You are not going to let them ever see the least insubordination or indiscretion on your part.”

“Certainly, I ain’t,” said Fanny, aggrieved.

“You must not say ‘ain’t,’ Fanny.”

“Bain’t?” said Fanny, pursing up her mouth, and looking droll.

A pat was her rebuke: but a little smile followed it.

“Oh no,” said Fanny, very seriously. “I only said that for fun, and I am never going to

say such things when the others come. I will not give you the least morsel of trouble, if I can help it. I would rather save you a great deal ! Only give me just a smile, or a kiss, or a pat, now and then, when nobody is by.”

“ Well, I’ll think of it, Fanny.”

Seven pupils were expected. The first was to come at about four o’clock, by the heavy coach, from some distance. Fanny sat near the window, anxiously watching for her, and, at intervals, reading Jane Taylor’s “ Correspondence between a Mother and a Daughter at School,” frequently expressing her intention to be another Grace Dacre.

“ Here comes Miss Unwin !” said she at last. “ Is there any reason, Miss Middlemass, why we should not call one another by our Christian names ? ”

“ Well—no, I think not,” said I.

“ Isabella ! ” said Jacintha in an undertone,

"you really must leave off speaking in that undecided way. 'I think not,' will never do for a schoolmistress!"

"True," said I; and, at the same instant, Hawkins ushered in the new comer.

She looked formal and shy. Jacintha and I received her with kindness; and then Marian and Fanny carried her off to her room.

In about an hour Marian returned, saying she had left the two girls to get on together, which they were doing very well, and that Miss Unwin's ice was rapidly thawing under Fanny's sociability.

Next came the two Miss Duncans, under the escort of their pleasant father. He was "quite sure we should find them very good girls indeed, and that they would like school very much;" and while they, like Miss Unwin, were carried off by Marian and Fanny, he

remained to have a little sociable chat with Jacintha and me. Jacintha was in good spirits, and looking her best; she was pleased by his encouraging auguries, and told him that she did not feel at all doubtful of success. "And we are all going to be very comfortable together," said she. "Just come and see, Mr. Duncan, what a nice schoolroom we have prepared for them."

We all three rose, and crossed the hall, and she triumphantly threw open the door.

"This! *This* the schoolroom?" cried Mr. Duncan, whose little girls had now returned, and were nestling close to him. "Why this is a palace! and my little girls will think themselves princesses! Why, this beautiful room is replete with every comfort!—and elegance too! Dear me, how surprised and delighted mamma will be when I tell her. Well, girls, I can only say, you must be very grateful to

these kind ladies, and not give them one bit of trouble you can help. And now good-by, darlings, and may God bless you!"

A tear shone in the eyes of each little girl as they saw him depart, but Fanny said something cheerful to them the next minute, and presently they were summoned to tea.

As they took their seats, and glanced round with satisfaction at the nicely arranged tea-table, on which our thin bread-and-butter and my dry toast were flanked by currant buns and very plain cake, for their young, healthy appetites, I overheard one little girl whisper to another with an eager smile, "Quite like a party!"

And they behaved as well as if it were a party; and we all talked our full share, and were very cheerful. After tea, I produced the large folio engravings published with the first

edition of Captain Cook's Voyages, and these afforded entertainment for the rest of the evening.

The other girls arrived late by the mail. Poor children ! they looked so dreadfully sleepy. Tea restored them a little, and we then had the prayer-bell rung. Four servants came in, the cook, laundry-maid, Hawkins, and an under housemaid. I read the twenty-third Psalm, and then prayed. A strong impulse led me, instead of using a printed form, to utter a short, fervent, extempore prayer, in simple language, adapted to our immediate circumstances. I had never done such a thing before, and my face glowed ; but I felt it was effective, and trusted it would be effectual. I always did so thenceforth. When we rose from our knees, Jacintha led the Evening Hymn on the piano, and we all sang it. The children looked surprised, impressed, and

pleased ; it was sweet to hear their young, unsteady voices—

Humble though our efforts be,
And untuneable the parts ;
God accepts the minstrelsy,
If it spring from grateful hearts.

Then I called them to me and kissed each of them ; and Marian led them off to bed. When she returned to supper, she said they had said their prayers, and were all asleep.

“ Thank God ! ” said I ; “ thank God this day is well and happily over ! ”

“ Amen,” said my sisters.

“ Isabella,” said Jacintha, “ how *could* you have the courage to pray extempore ? ”

“ I had an odd kind of feeling when I had once begun. I feared you might not like it, but I resolved to go on.”

“ I liked it very much ; only I wondered how you *could*. ”

“They all liked the singing,” said Marian.

“We all like something in which we can take our own share,” said I; “it awakens devotion and keeps it awake.”

“The buns, also, were duly appreciated,” said Marian, laughing.

“I mean to have them once or twice a week. It will give a little air of festivity to the table, and save Hawkins the cutting so much bread-and-butter.”

“We must take care not to pet them much at first,” said Jacintha, “or they will depend on it afterwards.”

“Not *too* much,” said I. “But dependence on others’ kindness, on reasonable grounds, is no bad bulwark of mind and temper.”

I would not go to bed, old maid that I was ! without looking in on the little dears in their snug beds. All were in rosy sleep, save one ; she started, and hastily said, “Mamma !”

then, with a satisfied “oh!” closed her eyes again, murmuring “it’s just like home.” She could not have paid a greater compliment.

I lay down to rest, but not to sleep, with an oppressive sense of responsibility. Most fervently I prayed God to

Bless the house from nightly harm.

It seemed to me that no earthly insurance was worthy of any dependence. I wondered how parents of large families could sleep at night, in a world where fire burns and thieves break in. At length I remembered that they had the same heavenly Friend whom I had been seeking, and that He never fails his people.

It had already been decided, against my will, that I was not strong enough to take part in any of the proceedings before breakfast. As a set-off against this, I had obtained that we should all have our meals together. None of us were epicures; and the good, plain

fare, and early hours, suited to our young charges, were not unpalatable to us. As for rest and quiet, none of us then thought of needing either. We were buckling on our armour, not laying it aside after a hard-fought field.

They all came in fresh and rosy when the prayer-bell rang. When they gathered round the breakfast table I was surprised to find how much had already been done. Jacintha had given two music lessons, and Marian had had a general Scriptural examination. And, after this, they had found time for a healthy run round the garden before the bell rang.

Marian had brought in a few hepaticas, which she placed in water in the little room formerly appropriated to my grandmother, and now my morning room. When I had given my orders for the day (which, having previously well digested, gave me less trouble this first morn-

ing than on many a subsequent one), I returned to this room, and found a quiet little girl copying the flowers in pencil. I gave her a hint or two, and then returned to my sofa and plain-work, of which there was still a good deal in the way of table and bed-linen to get through ; and another little girl came in to me and began to read Markham's "History of England." When she had read enough, she changed with the other, and drew while the first read, afterwards Marian fetched them both away, and sent another to practise. I must own to not being fond of hearing girls strumming ; however, it was all in the day's work—a good deal of it, too ! And though I could not sit up at the piano and give a regular lesson like Jacintha, yet, having a good ear, I could say, "my dear, B flat," or "C sharp," and so forth, whenever I heard a false note, or say, "you made that a crotchet

instead of a quaver.” This acted as a check, and prevented the practising in the teacher’s absence from being the witless waste of time it too often is.

When this girl and another had gone away, Jacintha looked in on me for a minute, to say, with interest—

“ Well, how are you getting on ? ”

“ Very well. How are you ? ”

“ Very well indeed. Really I rather like it. They seem bright girls, and docile too. Have you had too much practising ? ”

“ Oh, no ! ”

“ That’s a good thing, because you are going to have some more, while I give music-lessons in the drawing-room. By the by, I am getting very hungry.”

“ I dare say they are too. You shall all have plain cake at twelve o’clock.”

“ Should not the children have bread ? ”

“Well, we are not very fond of dry bread ourselves, and cannot expect them to be. I have made a very economical arrangement with the baker; the cakes are little more than bread sweetened and slightly spiced; and we are paid so handsomely for these children that I do not wish to ‘shave’ quite as closely as Mrs. Cole recommended.”

“You are *maitresse-d'hôtel*,” said Jacintha with perfect good humour.

At three we dined. At four they all started for a walk—Jacintha taking the lead with the two eldest by a different route to a given point from Marian, because she did not yet like closing a boarding-school procession of two-and-two.

I enjoyed the lull. My health was but what Scotch people call “silly,” and I was not yet quite equal to the bustle of a large establishment. But I “bated no jot of heart nor hope:”

only I *enjoyed the lull*, that was all. And the use I made of it was, firstly, to lie on the sofa awhile, in perfect inaction, without thinking particularly of anything ; then writing a cheerful letter to John, telling him we had made a brave beginning and were all doing wonders ; and begging to be most kindly remembered to his fair lady. (What bad grammar ‘remembered *to*’ a person is !) Just as I had closed my letter, I had the refreshment of a visit from kind Mrs. Meade ; and then I summoned Hawkins, and bade her draw me in my wheel-chair along the laurels in the sun.

After the walkers returned, rosy and joyous, fancy-work and French reading were the order of the day. This gave repose to all ; and, as they had brought home some wild-flowers, I gave a botany lesson to a class of four. It is not needful to go into more details of the day’s work ; we all agreed afterwards that a great

deal had been done and well done, at a moderate cost of fatigue. Teachers and pupils were equally fresh at their work. We did not have buns or cake this evening; but the meal was equally pleasant; nay, more so, I think. I have often heard much inferior table-talk in much superior circles. After tea there were exercises to write, and arithmetical questions to solve. Then came a historical game, then prayers and “good night.” Our review of the day was very pleasant. I was particularly amused at Fanny Ward’s confidential whisper as she kissed me—“How well it has gone off!”

The next day there was variety in the lessons learnt and given, but there was equal order and regularity. The weather was changeable; I therefore recommended a walk before dinner instead of after, which was well, as they secured a nice dry walk, and the afternoon set

in wet. A good many lessons were got through in the afternoon, and needlework was postponed till the evening. I took even my sisters by surprise by plates heaped with short-bread at tea-time; and afterwards, when I saw Jacintha look round with rather a fatigued air, that expressed, "Well, what must be done next?" I said, "My dear Jacintha, if it is not asking too much, I should very much like you to oblige us with one of my favourite songs. In attending so much to the practising of others, you must not neglect practising yourself."

Jacintha was pleased, and instantly complied. The young auditors were struck by her brilliant performance, and one or two drew near her. It gratified her. "Come," said she, "why should not we learn an easy glee? 'Five times by the taper's light,' or 'Piano, pianissimo?'" A little choir was instantly organized: and after

that, I had enough (I don't say too much) of

'Where's father?' 'He's gone out to roam,'

and

'Piano, pianissimo! senza parlar.'

They soon learnt their separate parts very nicely; and, thenceforth, glee-singing became a favourite evening amusement. One of the little Duncans made a droll mistake. She said, "Why should their father go to *Rome*?"

As Marian observed, instruction is not less instructive for being entertaining. While the glee-singers were gathered round the piano, the needles of the others sped swiftly; and sometimes one of them played a game of chess with me—not quite worthy of being printed in the *Illustrated London News*.

The following day was wet without intermission. It was suitable, therefore, for a dancing lesson; and Jacintha presided at the piano while Marian was dancing-mistress.

Marian had once had a winter's teaching from the best of London dancing-mistresses, whose name I need not mention.

In the evening we had reading aloud and working, instead of music. The story was Miss Edgeworth's "Angelina; or, L'Amie Inconnue," which produced a great deal of laughing, especially the chapters read by Marian, who humorously gave the national accents of the Welsh country-girl and Irish hackney-coachman. I observed that the readers who followed her copied her in this, and endeavoured to produce the same effect.

At the end of a week, we seemed to have kept school a month; at the end of a month, we seemed to have kept school three months; at the end of three months, we seemed to have kept school a year. The routine and discipline had become perfect: the children were healthy, happy, and

making great progress ; their teachers were a good deal fagged, but kept on cheerily. I found my liberal housekeeping certainly threatened to diminish our profits, but not so much so as to render it a matter of duty to draw in. Sometimes Marian had bad headaches, which made her look very white ; but, otherwise, she seemed to have nothing to complain of. Jacintha occasionally looked worn and dispirited, but I whispered to her, “Mid-summer is at hand !” and she cleared up again, and went on nobly.

CHAPTER VII.

By what astrology of fear or hope
Dare I to cast thy horoscope ?
Like the new moon thy life appears,
A little strip of silver light ;
And widening outward into night,
The shadowy disc of future years.

LONGFELLOW.

ABOUT a month before the holidays, Jacintha received a very kind letter from John, saying that he was going to be married in five weeks, and that it was his bride's wish, as well as his own, that Jacintha should be bridesmaid, and accompany them on their wedding excursion. This invitation was very opportune : Jacintha both needed and deserved relaxation after her indefatigable labours ; and

the prospect of joining the wedding party flattered her and raised her spirits. It reacted on her daily exertions: never had the children found her in better humour, and her cheerfulness pervaded the house.

John was gratified by the cordial letter of thanks and acceptance; and, by the next post, sent her a twenty-pound note for her outfit, saying that he did not feel justified in drawing her into expenses she could ill afford, and only wished he could make it more. By the same post he inclosed me a thirty-pound note, to take Marian and me to the sea-side, while Jacintha was enjoying her gaiety; paying us some very gratifying compliments on our exertions and success. It was very kind and handsome of John, from first to last.

We had been consulting what presents we could make him on his marriage, and decided on a very handsome though old-fashioned

pendule, which we thought he would value, because it had been our grandfather's. But, now, we thought this would not be enough; so, instead of the pendule, we decided on sending him an Indian cabinet of five times the value, a carved ivory pagoda, and one of Marian's best water-coloured landscapes, nicely framed. John was much pleased with these presents.

And now began the pleasing bustle of preparation for the holidays. The children were naturally joyful at the idea of returning to their homes; yet I heard one of them whisper to another, "If it were not for seeing mamma and Freddy, I would just as soon stay here!" As for Fanny Ward, I am persuaded she was sorry that breaking-up day was at hand.

Well—that notable day arrived in due course: our young pets were all dispersed, under proper charge, after very affectionate

leave-takings; and we were once more left in the old house by ourselves. How empty it seemed! We did enjoy our liberty, though! and our rest, and our quiet, and our independence of that duty-recalling bell.

In ten minutes after the last adieu had been spoken, Marian had started for a solitary walk, and Jacintha was bringing down into my room heaps of tarletan, white, rose-colour, pale blue, and gladly availing herself of my offer to make the skirts of all her dresses; while Hawkins, in afternoon gown and best apron, was respectfully and smilingly taking her seat in the same room, a little apart, to undertake the sleeves.

We all worked very hard, yet all felt it complete relaxation, and our tongues went as fast as our needles. Jacintha, in passing a window, happened to look out, and exclaimed, “Oh!” and instantly began laughing.

“A solitary walk, indeed,” said she, merrily.

“ Marian has soon picked up a companion !
And who do you think it is ? ”

“ I cannot imagine , ” said I , conjuring up
the vision of some smart young gallant , dropt
from the skies .

“ Fanny Ward , of course ! ” cried Jacintha .
“ They have not been long asunder . ”

Even Hawkins could not help laughing .
“ ‘ Like cleaves to like , ’ they say , ” said she ,
“ and certainly Miss Ward *is* a nice little
lady . ”

“ So that’s the way you take us in ! ” was
our greeting to Miss Marian when she re-
turned .

“ What ? ” said Marian , looking surprised
and innocent .

“ A ‘ solitary walk , ’ indeed ! *We saw you !* ”

“ Oh ! ” said Marian , laughing a little con-
sciously , “ I fell in with Fanny Ward , who
would not be shaken off ; and as a country

walk was better for her than running about the town, I let her accompany me. Oh, and I have accepted an invitation to drink tea with the Wards. I am so sorry Mrs. Ward did not include you, Jacintha ! I suppose she was afraid.”

“ Oh, it is no disappointment to me, thank you,” said Jacintha. “ I would much rather stay with Isabella and get on with my dresses. See what a show we are making !”

“ I’ll come and help you with the bodices directly, Jacintha.”

“ Aye, do, there’s a good child.”

Marian was soon zealously at work ; and, when a visitor was announced, neither she nor Jacintha would quit their work. I had orders to say “ they were particularly engaged.” I had quite a little levée that afternoon, and everybody was so pleasant and kind ! Mr. Duncan, who was one of them, said—

“I understand we are to meet Miss Marian this evening.”

“Oh, are you to be there?” said I. “I did not know there was to be a party.”

So I told Marian of it when we met at dinner, which was late, just because we were not obliged to dine early. She thanked me for the information, and, when she came down from her simple toilette, she was in white muslin, with a crimson and blush rose in her bosom. She looked so lovely!

Jacintha, after surveying her attentively, said—

“It is a pity you are only going to a draper’s!”

“Ah, that’s a melancholy fact,” said Marian, gaily. “I shall not break my heart about it. Don’t expect me till you see me. Mr. Ward promised to send me home.”

“Ah!” said Jacintha, with a sigh, when

she was gone, “if ever that hacknied line about the flower born to blush unseen were applicable to anybody, it is to Marian ! What a pity !”

“Never mind,” said I. “Perhaps I apply it to you ; and perhaps our dear grandmother applied it to *me*. I am sure she thought so of Aunt Christy.”

Marian returned late, which we did not mind, as we were able to get on all the more with the dresses. When she did come back, we heard the cheerful voices of more than one male escort wishing her good-by at the door ; and in she came the next moment, fresh as a rose.

“Well,” said she, gladly, and slipping off her shawl, “such a pleasant evening !”

“I am glad of that ! Who saw you home ?”

“Such capital companions ! Mr. Ward and Mr. Duncan !”

“Only Mr. Ward and Mr. Duncan?” repeated Jacintha, with disappointment.

“Why, Jacintha! who *could* you expect?” said Marian, laughing.

“True! And were they, then, all your party?”

“All but old Mrs. Greene, and Mrs. Tabor, and Mrs. Duncan.”

“What a stupid party!”

“Stupid? quite the reverse, I tell you! I only wish I could go to such a one every week.”

“Why, what *did* you do?”

“I talked a great deal with Mrs. Ward and Mrs. Duncan; and also with Mr. Ward and Mr. Duncan, whom I found very companionable indeed; and Fanny and I played ‘*Vous et Moi*’ in fine style, and brought down thunders of applause! Then we sang ‘Where the bee sucks,’ with equal success. Then I, by practice made bold, graciously assented to the

united company's proposal that 'I would favour them with a song.'"

"English, I hope?"

"What, Italian would be wasted on them? Not so, Miss Jacintha! Mr. Duncan understands Italian, and sang 'Per valli, per boschi' with me!"

"Marian!"

"*He did!* There now, Jacintha! But I sang an English song first—two English songs afterwards."

"What were they?"

"Firstly, 'Will you gang to the ewebuchts, Marian?'"

"That's Scotch!"

"And then, 'Kathleen mavourneen.'"'

"That's Irish! What was the third?"'

"Why,—the third—was 'Will ye gang to the ewebuchts' over again."

"An encore! quite a compliment," said Jacintha.

“Quite so. So it was meant. Mr. Duncan said he wished he could sing it himself.”

“What—

‘Fain would I marry,
Fain would I marry,
Fain would I marry Marian?’”

“If Marian would marry *me*,” added Marian.
“Aye, it was very saucy of him.”

“Well, I had no idea——” said Jacintha, dropping her work, and falling into a reverie.

“Jacintha!” cried Marian suddenly, and laughing heartily, “I’m playing you a trick !”

“A trick !” exclaimed I.

“Then, there *was* somebody else there !” cried Jacintha. “I was sure of it !”

“No, there was not !”

“Then, what is the truth ?”

“I won’t tell you till to-morrow ! It will give you and Isabella something to think about.”

"*Nobody* there, but Mr. and Mrs. Duncan, and the three old ladies?"

"No one else."

"And Mr. Duncan sings Italian?"

"And reads it, and has been in Italy!—"

"Well—'Mr. Hobbs and Mr. Dobbs' have been there too, Washington Irving says."

"But Mr. Duncan is neither Hobbs nor Dobbs: he talks well—entertainingly—interestingly."

"Oh! *I've* heard Mr. Duncan talk," said Jacintha, curling her lip.

"*Have you?*" returned Marian complacently. "Now then, I wish both you two ladies a very good-night. I suppose you have forgotten what o'clock it is; and yet this has not been an idle day." She was gone the next minute.

"What spirits she is in!" said I. "What a simple treat suffices her!"

"Simple enough," said Jacintha pondering,

“if it be as she says. But yet, she owns she has played us a trick—Oh! I must find it out before I can sleep !”

And she hastily began to put away her work for the night, in which I assisted her. We had had supper and prayers long before.

When Jacintha tried Marian’s door, however, it was locked; so she contented herself with giving it a shake, and crying out, “Naughty girl!” and went to bed.

I, for a wonder, was first down the following morning, for Jacintha always indulged in late rising when she could, and Marian, tired with her unwonted dissipation, overslept herself. My letters were lying on the breakfast table, and proved to be inquiries about school-matters, which put the party completely out of my head; and when my sisters came down, I began to talk to them of the contents of these letters, which for a time engrossed us all. Then

Jacintha opened and read aloud a letter from John, full of wedding arrangements, which interested us all very deeply. She was just beginning—"But, Marian, by the by—" when Hawkins came in about some trivial matter; then the breakfast table was cleared, and Marian had disappeared before any one missed her. We soon heard her practising "do, re, mi, fa,"—but Jacintha and I were again too busy at the dresses to trouble ourselves about her.

About an hour afterwards, she put her head in at the door, saying, "Shall I come and help you now?"

"Yes, by all means," said Jacintha; "for Hawkins is otherwise engaged."

She immediately took up the bodice she was making, and re-commenced her work with great zeal.

"You must try this on, presently, Jacintha,"

said she; “it will soon be ready for fitting.”

“Yes,” said Jacintha, “but, in the meantime, pray enlighten us a little about that wonderful trick you played us last night.”

“Why,” said Marian, laughing, “the opportunity was irresistible—or at any rate, I was in high spirits, and found it so—like a girl let loose from school, in fact.”

“Which you were,” said I.

“Which I was,” said Marian. “The capital joke consisted in my not telling you that the Mr. Duncan I met was not *our* Mr. Duncan, but another Mr. Duncan.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Jacintha, dropping her work.

“The member?” cried I.

“No; the member’s younger brother, Mr. Francis Duncan. Such a nice person!”

“Dear me!” said I.

"To think of his going to Mr. Ward's!" said Jacintha.

"Ay, there's no knowing what luck I might have missed by being as fastidious as you," said Marian, mischievously.

"No, indeed," said Jacintha, with seriousness.

"But you spoke of *Mrs.* Duncan," said I.

"Yes, that was our *Mrs.* Duncan who brought him. He is not married."

"Did you know of his being expected before you went?"

"Dear me, no," said Marian. "Mrs. Ward even did not expect him: nor yet Mrs. Duncan. He had arrived uninvited, and, as our Mr. Duncan had a business engagement, and Mrs. Duncan was going to a little party, he readily went with her."

"A very different one from the parties he is accustomed to, I should think," said Jacintha.

"Probably," said Marian. "But he did not

seem grievously offended ; and, as he is going home this morning, there is no danger of our again coming ‘ betwixt the wind and his gentility.’ ”

“ Going so soon ! ”

“ Yes, to Pendynas, where his father’s great colliery-works are. Oh, Isabella ! I must tell you ! Mrs. Duncan is *so* delighted, already even, with the improvement in her little girls ! She says that the education they are receiving will be worth any money to them, and is particularly valuable, because Mr. Duncan really is going to retire from business, and is in treaty for the purchase of a country estate.”

“ Then we shall no longer have tradesmen’s *daughters* ! ” cried Jacintha. “ Only a tradesman’s daughter ! ”

“ Ah ! I really think you would like to throw over poor Fanny ! ” said Marian.

"I care very little about it, now," said Jacintha. "The mischief is done."

"Well, the Wards seem to think the reverse of mischief has been done," said Marian. "They are so pleased!"

"They ought to be!" said Jacintha.

"Apparently, we shall start with several older girls, after the holidays," said I.

"All the better," said Marian. "It will be so interesting to train them."

"A good deal more labour, though," said I.

"Oh, I don't regard that," said Marian.

"Nor I, in the least," said Jacintha, absently. "Isabella, would you mind lending me your pearl bracelets during the month?"

"Not at all," said I. "Only be careful of them, as they were a gift from my mother."

"Oh, of course I will. Thank you!"

"Yes," said Marian, pursuing her own reflections, "it certainly will be very interesting

to have older girls to bring forward ; and I much doubt whether it will not be less trouble instead of more, they will require so much less help, and will take an intelligent view of the purposes of their education.”

“ If you give it them !”

“ Which, of course, we all shall. I look forward to it with pleasure. I would gladly begin with them to-morrow ; only that I shall be the better for a little rest. Mr. Francis Duncan asked me how I liked school-keeping, and I told him ‘ very much.’ He looked so incredulous !”

“ Well he might,” said Jacintha. “ He knew it, then ?”

“ Oh, of course, his cousin had told him ; or, if not, he would have learnt it in ten minutes, for everybody was asking, quite in a friendly way, how we were getting accustomed to it, and whether we were not very glad of the holidays.”

"One of the friendly freedoms that might have been dispensed with," said Jacintha.

"I did not mind it; I did not wish to conceal it," said Marian. "And when Mr. Duncan said he thought I must find it a bore, I told him 'not at all,' and gave him so many reasons for it that at length he saw the matter quite as I did. And now, Jacintha, you must try on this bodice before I can set another stitch."

CHAPTER VIII.

Ah ! if thy fate, with anguish fraught,
Should be to wet the dusty soil
With the hot burning tears of toil,—
To struggle with imperious thought,
Until the overburthened brain,
Heavy with labour, faint with pain,
Like a jarred pendulum, retain
Only its motion, not its power :
Remember, in that perilous hour,
When most afflicted and oppressed,
From labour there shall come forth rest.

LONGFELLOW.

“ COME,” said I, after Marian had worked very busily for a couple of hours, “you may now as well go and take one of your ‘solitary walks.’ ”

“ I mean to do so,” said Marian, “as soon as I have set the last stitch in this bodice, which will be in two minutes ; and on my

return, I shall have something very particular to do in my own room."

"‘A good novel’ to read, probably,” said Jacintha.

“Perhaps,” said Marian. “Oh, I do not forget that these are my holidays!”

I was glad to hear her say so, for she was full as much in need of relaxation as Jacintha, and I saw no reason why, when one was going to have all the gaiety, the other should work for her as if she were paid by the day.

Marian went out; and Jacintha observed, as she broke off her thread, “I should not wonder if that Mr. Francis Duncan were to call here while she is away.”

“I should, very much,” said I. “These are not the days of Evelina and Cecilia, when gentlemen called in the morning on ladies they had danced with overnight.”

“Mrs. Duncan might so easily bring him,”

said Jacintha. However, the event proved me in the right, for the gentleman never made his appearance. Marian really had a solitary walk this time, and returned with a large nosegay of wild flowers, which she carried up to her own room, doubtless to make some grand experiment upon.

In a few days Jacintha departed in high spirits; and Marian and I remained to make our little arrangements. Two of the servants were sent to visit their friends: another remained in charge, and Hawkins accompanied us to a little sea-bathing place called Fishport, about forty miles off.

The journey was performed safely and pleasantly. On reaching Fishport, we took a fly, and began to seek lodgings. There were not many, for it was quite a small place; but a civil baker directed us to a neat house, the last of a row, facing the sea, and tenanted by two

maiden sisters, who took lodgers, and “ did for them,” as the saying is.

The Misses Linnet might be fifty-five and fifty years of age. The eldest was tall, spare, stately, shrewd, and did all the bargaining with lodgers. The younger was a trim, active, pleasant-looking little woman, who, with the assistance of an uncouth girl, got through everything that was to be done; always busy, and never out of temper.

It was a hard life: I often thought, with thankfulness, how much superior was our lot to theirs. But they were quite content: their education had not been such as to promise them success in any higher department; and they were thankful to keep together, and make both ends meet, at the price of any amount of trouble they were capable of.

“ You see your accommodation, ladies,” said Miss Linnet, with a gracious wave of

her hand. “It is modest and unpretending ; yet, such as it is, it has sufficed for the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon, and her companion, Miss Flipp. However, we do not boast much of our aristocracy—people come here to enjoy retirement and repose, and need not the gaudy gew-gaws of the world of fashion—which is the reason we have, as yet, no public rooms, though, doubtless, in time we shall compete with other watering-places.”

Hawkins remarked afterwards of this lady, that “she seemed very choice in her expressions.”

Of course, there was a fine sea smell and sea taste, and, of course, we had prawns for tea, and Marian resolved to bathe before breakfast. She enjoyed unpacking, and putting all my little useful things in handy places, and taking out her drawing-box, and writing-ease, and sketch-book, and work basket. In five

minutes after the unpacking was finished, she tied on her bonnet to post a note I had written to Jacintha, to tell her our address—No. 12, Sea View. Miss Linnet showed Marian that the door could be opened from the outside, without taking the trouble to knock or ring every time she came in; which Marian thought delightfully unsophisticated, and I thought rather unsafe.

When Marian returned, she flew to the book-shelf to examine its contents. They comprised, “The Romance of the Forest,” the “Mysteries of Udolpho,” “Cœlebs in Search of a Wife,” “Religious Courtship,” “Memoirs of a Cavalier,” the “Death of Abel,” Glover’s “Leonidas,” and Robinson’s “Scripture Characters.” Marian said she should read them all, and I think she did. However, we had been provident enough to bring our own literature with us.

One of the characteristics of the present day, when everybody reads, or is supposed to read, is the terror created by the offer of a book. A friend listens to you with assumed interest while you dilate on the pleasure you have received from such and such a work, but if you are goose enough to add, "Shall I lend it you?" a look of the utmost dismay succeeds those of smiles, and the hurried answer is, "O no, no, I thank you! I am overwhelmed just now with books. Friends have lent me so many, and I have bought so many, and have so many from the public library and book-club, that I have more than I can possibly look into already!" This grievance had not made itself so powerfully felt in the days I am speaking of.

What a pleasant month that was! Marian delighted herself like a child, in pebbles, and shells, and sea-weeds, and spars, and different

coloured sands, all of which she could manufacture into “something new and strange?” She loved bathing, and would come in, her long dark hair hanging down her back, to breakfast, or join me where I sat on the shingle, reading or netting, and would read or net beside me. She loved talking to the old fishermen and their wives; and, under pretence of some very eligible investment in shrimps, or perhaps even a lobster or crab, would beguile them of many a chat that led to the story of some awful storm or shipwreck. One day, when we were sitting on the shingle, a poor old woman hobbled up to us with one or two sand-drawings for sale. They represented, or were meant to represent, the church and an old sea tower, but were in such wretched perspective, as to make one’s eyes ache to look at. She said they were done by a son who was crippled by falling from the cliff. I bought one of the drawings out of

charity, but Marian did better ; she executed a few correct and pretty sand-drawings for the poor lad, showed him how to copy them, and thus enabled him to get shillings, instead of six-pences, for what were, after all, much better bargains to the purchasers.

During this recess, Marian wrote a tale, and composed a song, and drew a series of illustrations of Fishport, which the proprietor of the only library was glad to get engraved at the top of note-paper sheets. The tale was accepted by the editor of a local magazine, who paid her ten shillings per double-column page : the song was printed after we went home. Of course the money was acceptable, and gave Marian the opportunity of various benevolences that in her circumstances could not be considered small. But I chiefly mention these things to show how her mind, like a flowing river, fertilised its course ; or, like a rich

meadow, brought forth sweet flowers. Even in what she called idleness, she could not be idle ; and if she sat beside me on the shingle in profound silence, with her eyes upturned to the skies, or fixed on the advancing tide, I knew she was thinking how to make something clever, or do some one good.

Sometimes we talked in a leisurely way of the characters of our pupils, and our expectations of our new ones—arranged various little plans, and provided remedies for expected difficulties. We seemed to expect we should go on school-keeping all our lives. At any rate, there was no immediate prospect of our realizing fortunes.

“ Girls hate writing themes,” said Marian ; “ but there are plenty of other ways of teaching composition. I mean to set up a monthly periodical—in manuscript, of course,—and invite contributions in prose and verse, including

short and spirited translations. The rewards to the best contributors shall be copies of the numbers in which their contributions appear. The copying will be a very good exercise."

I laughed at a girl thinking it a *reward* to copy out a whole number for the sake of her own contribution.

"You will see," said Marian, with a confident look. "I know they will like it."

"Some of these girls," resumed she, "will be expected to go through a course of good English reading. What do you understand by a course of reading?"

"A course," said I, "may be either broad or long,—a race-course, for instance. A course of English reading in history need not embrace a long number of years, from Bede to Macaulay. Suppose you took a subject,—the Great Rebellion, for instance,—and read all the books you could get upon it,—Clarendon,

Lucy Hutchinson, and so forth,—that would be a course of reading.”

“ And a very interesting one, too,” said Marian. “ That would be a broad course: I will keep it in mind.”

We soon knew by sight the few visitors at this quiet little watering-place. There was an invalid gentleman and his anxious-looking little wife; there was the fat mother of a large family of unruly children, who screamed vigorously when they were bathed; there was a determined-looking woman with frowning brow and masculine step, who wore short petticoats, and paced up and down, apparently steeling herself for some disagreeable but necessary mode of action. There was a tall, mild-looking, dignified old lady, dressed in black, who supported herself on a tall, gold-headed cane, nearly as high as herself, and who moved very slowly, and looked very sweetly.

One day, when Marian had left me on my pile of cushions and shawls while she went to bathe, I found lying on the shingle a book, which proved to be Cranz's "History of the Moravians." The name of Mary Heseltine was written in it; but, as I did not know who Mary Heseltine was, I thought the best way would be to take the book to the public library to be set in the window till claimed; and, meanwhile, I dipped into the book, which seemed attractive.

Presently a pleasant voice said quietly, "I hope my book interests you."

I started, and saw before me the tall old lady.

"Oh," said I, "I beg your pardon. You have relieved me from some embarrassment; for I was doubtful whether the only measure that occurred to me might secure the return of the book to its owner."

"I am much obliged to you for the trouble

you meant to take," said she, settling herself on a little camp-stool, "and glad I have saved you any. You do not look very strong, any more than myself."

"I am not an invalid, however," said I. "I only came here for a little change during the holidays."

"You keep a school, then," said she, quickly. "Ah, I, too, know something of school-keeping, but of a different sort from what yours is likely to be."

"A Moravian one, probably," said I, glancing at the volume she had received from my hand.

"Yes," she replied; and seeing my look expressed interest, she frankly spoke of it, and I drew from her many pleasing and instructive details. In the midst of them Marian returned, and silently seated herself beside me.

"Your sister, I conclude?" said Miss Heseltine.

"Yes," said I, "she is as much concerned in school-keeping as I am—in fact, does a great deal more."

"Then I need not mind going on," said the old lady, with whom Marian soon became as much charmed as I was. From that time forth we used to meet daily, and derived both instruction and delight from her conversation. I have never seen her since; but I shall never forget her; and many things she said were not without their deep and lasting influence.

Marian and I could not help being amused by the eccentricities of our hostess, the eldest Miss Linnet. Some people, when they meet with a peculiar character, solve all difficulties by saying,—"I think he (or she) must be a little cracked." That is not my way of accounting for it: I think there is an infinite variety in the human species, and that individual characteristics, when not rubbed down by too much intercourse with the world, con-

tinually display themselves with an originality that is both curious and entertaining.

The first morning, Hawkins came in to join us in family prayer as usual ; the second day, the worthy old lady, when she had possessed herself of our wishes respecting dinner, smoothed her faded black silk apron with her hands, hemmed, and then said—

“ Family worship formed no part of the domestic routine of the Honourable Mrs. Humbudgeon. But since you ladies have chosen the better part, and are evidently two of the wise virgins who trimmed their lamps, I hope it will be considered neither presumptuous nor intrusive if I propose that my sister and self should avail ourselves, as we would so gladly do, of the opportunity, if you will admit us.”

Of course I said I should be very glad ; and thenceforth the two good creatures always joined us morning and evening.

One day I was seated in what they called the arbour, in their little mite of a garden. The sun was cheerful, but there was an easterly wind. Presently Miss Linnet approached me, carrying what appeared a very diminutive dog's kennel.

"Are your feet cold?" said she.

"Rather," said I.

"Then put them into this," said she, "and you will soon find them quite warm, for there is a nice little carpet inside. I often use it myself in the winter, for I am very fond of sitting with my back to the fire, by which means my feet are exposed to a cold draught from the door; but, with this little contrivance, I keep them quite snug."

I smiled and bowed, for I was afraid of laughing if I spoke; and she not only placed my feet in it, but tucked my dress in all round, which I secretly resolved to displace the instant she was gone. Just as she disappeared, how-

ever, I saw Marian coming in, and resolved to await her. The instant she saw me, she burst out laughing.

“Why,” said she, “you taper off to a point like a well-cut pencil!”

This set me off; but I laughed softly lest I should wound the feelings of kind Miss Linnet. Marian had been to the post-office, and brought home a letter from Jacintha. It was full of praises of Guernsey, which she said was famous for “fruit, flowers, and friendship”—and, indeed, nothing could be more friendly than the attention she had received from Mrs. John Middlemass’s family. We had previously had an account of the wedding, and now a succession of pleasure excursions on land and water left her little time for writing, but yet she managed to cross her full-filled sheets, deferring particulars of many agreeable incidents till we met.

A Mr. Mortlake figured a good deal in these letters; but, though Jacintha evidently liked

him very much, she rather shunned than dilated on his merits. Marian and I were quite idle enough to fill up an imaginary sketch of him, but it was in pure folly, for he merely appeared to be a pleasant acquaintance. We were, in reality, much more interested in everything relating to our new sister-in-law. Here Jaelintha was more minute; she spoke of her pretty height, pretty teeth, pretty hair, pretty complexion, till Marian said, "I can see her exactly!" And I thought I could, too; but, very likely her ideal and mine were not at all alike. Still, it was something to talk about, and as I would always sooner read or hear of a water-party than be of it, I was suited to my mind.

The holidays were but too soon ended. We went home at the conclusion of the month, because we knew we should have a week's work before us in preparing for our pupils. The increase in their numbers called for addi-

tional servants, and we engaged a nice girl at Fishport, who was willing to be our under-housemaid.

Miss Linnet took quite a tender leave of us ; and though her sister said little, a tear twinkled in her eye, when Marian, who had taken a great fancy for her, begged her to accept a small prettily-bound copy of "Mason on Self-Knowledge."

"It is not my custom," said Miss Linnet, "to attach myself strongly to my lodgers, knowing that even where they are worthy objects of attachment, which is not always the case, such sentiments, at the mercy of continual separations, only lacerate the heart ; but this I will say, that never before did I feel my heart drawn towards any ladies as it has been towards the Misses Middlemass ; and I only hope, ladies, the feeling has been reciprocal !"

CHAPTER IX.

Stern daughter of the voice of God,
 Oh Duty ! if that name thou love,
Who art a light to guide, a rod
 To check the erring, and reprove ;
Thou who art victory and law
 When empty terrors overawe,
From vain temptations dost set free,
 And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity.

WORDSWORTH : *Ode to Duty.*

I CAN understand how a dog feels having his collar put on, after coming home from a walk. We had had such a pleasant holiday ! I shall always look back on it with pleasure—it was such a complete rest ! and Marian and I enjoyed our long, leisurely talks together so much, and it was so delightful to see her so improved in health and spirits, and looking so lovely !

And yet there was pleasure in returning to the old house, too ; and in receiving Jacintha when she returned, only two days before the school reopened, glowing with beauty and animation.

Jacintha was a very handsome woman—Rubens and Titian would have delighted in such a study : her form and features were perhaps on rather too large a scale, but their proportions were perfect ; and when she was happy, there was a brightness about her that might, I think, be called fascinating.

She was almost too well dressed for travelling ; but she said joyously, “I wanted to make a pleasant impression on you when I returned ;” and the kind motive was rewarded with complete success. Then throughout the remainder of the evening we talked as only sisters can talk. Jacintha at first told us one thing and another rather disjointedly ; but

Marian exclaimed, “Oh, begin at the beginning, please !” and, laughing, she complied.

Hospitality seemed the marked feature in Mrs. John Middlemass’s family. They were not refined, but they were sociable ; at any rate the wedding festivities had shown or made them so. There seemed no end to the contrivances they had made to accommodate friends from a distance ; no end to the number and abundance of the meals ; no end to the succession of entertainments at their own and their neighbours’ houses. Jacintha supposed one might have enough and too much of it for a continuance ; but, for a little time, it was very pleasant, very delightful : it made such a thorough change. John had been very kind, and Laura quite sisterly. Oh, she was a nice creature, though she might not suit me and Marian as well as she suited her. Well, she could not say why, but we might think

her too gay; but not at all to excess: she was going to keep house very judiciously, and not to exceed their means on any account.

Then, the house—what was it like? Oh, a very nice house—small, but compact, and fitted up in very good taste. They were going to keep very little company, and live very quietly—at least, so John said.

Mr. Mortlake—his name slipped in so quietly!—and Marian and I were so careful not to look at one another! Had we exchanged a glance, we should have heard nothing; but our prudence was rewarded by hearing a good deal, one way or the other: and the result was, a conviction in our minds that he was an admirer—perhaps a serious admirer—of Jacintha's.

Usually she did not mind being rallied on such a topic; but there was a little flutter and hesitation about her first mention of him, that

made us instinctively feel it was too tender to be jested with ; and, after a little pause, she seemed to think, “ Oh, they don’t suspect anything,” and went on freely ; while we, sinners as we were, suspected all the while.

We went to bed in high good humour : the next day was equally cheerful, but a great deal was to be done in it, though much had been done before Jacintha returned.

The girls arrived : a dozen complete. Of the five new ones a few words may be said.

Mary Barnet was the daughter of a country clergyman. She had lost her mother, and was tenderly attached to her excellent father, to whom she desired to make herself as companionable and helpful as possible. Hence there was no emulation wanting to spur this good girl towards excellence in whatever she undertook ; and as she was both clever and industrious, she promised to excel in every-

thing. Jacintha was delighted with her intelligence and docility, and soon found her her favourite pupil. She was nearly seventeen; pale, with red hair, grey eyes, and a pleasing expression, though she was not pretty. Her figure was neat, and she was as tall as Marian.

Rose and Henrietta Callender were sisters, of sixteen and fourteen. Rose was dark as a West Indian (indeed her mother was one), with an intelligent rather than handsome face; and, like Mary Barnet, she was both industrious and clever. These two had kindred minds, and were not long finding it out. Henrietta was prettier than her sister, but very inferior to her in abilities. She was gentle, languid, indolent, and very slow and unsatisfactory in her studies. Her mother said to this young girl, with the utmost *sang-froid*, "Henrietta, you can't be clever; so you had better be interesting."

Henrietta was perfectly free from envy, or from affectation. She admired her sister and Mary Barnet, and, as long as she was permitted to form a third in this bond of friendship, only aspired to the lowest place. It was pleasant to see these three girls, in their hours of relaxation, strolling about together, their arms interlaced, along the broad, straight garden walks ; or, in-doors, with their three heads clustered together over some book or fancy-work.

Emma Grove was a long way behind these ; but she was a nice, plodding, well-conducted girl, thick-set, fair, fresh-coloured, with blue eyes, auburn, curling hair, and an honest, intelligent countenance. She was fourteen.

Margaret Forest was thirteen : my first impression of her was unpleasant. Her eyes, hair, and skin were those of a gipsey ; she was stunted, angular, awkward, with a hooked nose,

thin lips, and a kind of Napoleonic fixity of countenance. Indeed, one evening, when they were acting *tableaux*, she personated Napoleon at Elba.

The sight of Fanny Ward's undisguised joy as she bounded into Marian's arms, and then joyfully, though more temperately, quitted Jacintha and myself, had an encouraging effect on the new comers, who looked as if they thought we must be comfortable people, to inspire such affection.

During tea, Marian remarked that, though it was now summer, winter would surely arrive in a few months, and that those who expected to have Christmas-trees to decorate at home, or intended to make little presents of their own manufacture to the different members of their households, might as well begin to think about them in time. "A needle is a woman's peculiar implement," said she, "and it is a disgrace

not to know how to use it well ; but there is no occasion to spend interminable hours at what the Scotch call ‘white-seam :’ let two days have their fitting allotment of plain work ; but two others of work, whether plain or fancy, for charitable purposes, and the other two afternoons, which will be half-holidays, may enable us to get many pretty little Christmas gifts completed, without encroaching on our country rambles and other amusements.”

“That will be delightful !” exclaimed Fanny ; and the others looked what she expressed. Tongues were immediately unloosed, and many pretty designs projected—enough to take a much longer time to execute.

“And then, about the charity-work,” said Mary Barnet, with a pleasant mixture of frankness and diffidence, “I shall be particularly glad to assist in that, and learn cutting out and contriving, as much as I can, because it will be so useful to me in our parish.”

"Let us arrange what we can do," said the methodical Emma, taking out pocket-book and pencil.

"*I* can do nothing, I'm sure!" said Henrietta, rather helplessly.

"Yes, you can," said her sister; "you can satin-stitch beautifully; and, if you begin in time, you may work mamma a pair of sleeves."

"So I may," said Henrietta, brightening.

"I shall do nothing," said Margaret Forest, with decision; "I've no brothers nor sisters; and, if I had, they might work for themselves."

Fanny Ward opened her eyes very wide; but Margaret Forest was not to be daunted by a look.

"If you've nobody at home to work for," said a little girl, artlessly, "you may help some of us."

"Thank you," said Margaret, laconically.

The next morning, I could not help enjoying

the pleased surprise of the girls, on seeing piles of French rolls on the breakfast-table, and a diminutive pat of butter on the plate of each.

“ Dear me, this is very nice ! ” said Mary Barnet in a low tone. “ It does not seem at all like school.”

We now made bread at home ; and my cook, who was a very excellent baker, made rolls nearly as light as those in the shops, and that equally answered the purpose. We had taken counsel together, and agreed that each girl would eat no more bread in a tempting, than in a less attractive form ; and in a little time each would get accustomed to her one roll, (which, I beg to say, contained as much bread as she would otherwise have eaten,) and, by each spreading her own, save considerable trouble to the servants. To make sure of no stinting, however, a large household loaf was placed on the table ; but no one but Margaret

Forest asked for any of it; and when she found she must eat it dry,—having finished her pat of butter,—she left half untouched. She was thenceforth the only girl who ever asked for any of it; and as, if she had not economised her butter, she generally crumbled half her slice, or left it on her plate, and at length ceased to ask for it, I at length discontinued having the loaf placed on table.

I should mention that, partly to oblige a worthy tradesman, partly to oblige ourselves, we had taken a teacher—a Miss Dixon. She was a very methodical, quiet girl—not very bright, but very reliable—who, in requital for her gratuitous instruction in certain accomplishments, saved my sisters much fatigue by taking an English class of the younger girls, besides making herself generally useful. I believe her grand object was to sing like Jacintha, of which there was very little pros-

pect, for her voice was like that of a mouse in a cheese.

Well, we made a capital start this “half.” Everybody was energetic, everybody was in good spirits: everybody seemed ready to say, “Charming, charming! — delightful, delightful!”

I remember, one warm summer’s morning, I had a visit from old Miss Pope, who was accompanied by a tall, spare niece, of about thirty-five years of age, who had been teacher in a school. Good Miss Pope was benevolently anxious to know that her little goddaughters, the Duncans, did not give much trouble, and hoped we did not find ourselves overworked.

“Oh, no,” I said, “we all have plenty to do, but we get through it capitally, and sleep like tops when we go bed. Would you like to have a peep at the girls?”

“Dear me, yes, if it’s not quite out of rule!” cried Miss Pope, rising and looking quite fluttered. “Melissa will be so pleased, I am sure,” glancing at her niece, who looked unutterable things.

Nothing daunted, I crossed the hall, followed by my companions, and opened the door. Close to it, at a little work-table, were grouped the three heads of Mary Barnet and the Callenders, whose eyes seemed devouring their book. A little further on, in a lounging chair (with her feet crossed, I regret to say), Fanny Ward, learning something or other, her face completely hidden by her pendent flaxen locks, and her *pose* quite satisfactory to an artist, but not to a school teacher. At the large table, several girls drawing, superintended by Marian; two or three young ones at a distant window-seat with Miss Dixon; and one at the piano, practising a brilliant

duet with Jacintha, who looked round at us, but did not leave off.

In another minute we had withdrawn ; Miss Pope all smiles, and murmuring “ pretty dears !” I enjoying a competent allowance of complacence, and Miss Melissa, stern and glum, evidently considering that everything in the schoolroom was “ quite out of rule.”

Jacintha, as I have observed, was energetic and in good spirits. These good spirits seemed to me very much sustained by frequent letters from Mrs. John Middlemass, which were conned, quoted, enjoyed, smiled over, pondered over, but burnt, and never shown. Up to this time, our letters had always been in common : I don’t say whether it was a good plan or a bad plan, or whether it were a plan possible to observe when domestic relations and inner affections became more complicated ; but that had been the plan hitherto. What one knew,

all three knew, what gave joy or sorrow or mere amusement to one gave it to the rest: now, it was not so. Marian said softly to me one morning with a smile—

“Jacintha never shows her letters now.”

And then looked sorry she had made the observation. We did not allude to it again; and I am sure Jacintha felt, and was glad of, our delicacy.

The secret persuasion of Marian and myself undoubtedly was, that there was a hero in the case; but what sort of a hero we could very poorly make out. Mr. Mortlake’s name occasionally transpired, but not in a very significant way, unless to people who were bent on making something out of nothing. Still my impression was that our sister-in-law, Laura, rallied Jacintha about him, kept up her interest in him by scraps of his sayings and doings, and perhaps congratulated her seriously on

having evidently made a conquest, and that this was the source of the brightened eye and damask cheek. Else, why should she not have shown her letters?

Jacintha was very popular among the girls. And yet she was down upon them directly when they transgressed, or fell short of her expectations: would speak short, and with a flashing eye. But few transgressed often except Margaret Forest, who decidedly was a tiresome girl, stubborn and rebellious. If the others had not been so good, she might have infected them.

Sometimes, at night, Jacintha would say to me, "That child, Margaret Forest! what a toad she is! She is determined to take her own way, and I am determined she shall not. That spirit must be broken: I will not be defied."

Then she would tell me some instance of

her naughtiness, and end with joining me in laughing at it.

Marian had not forgotten our Moravian friend's account of her pupils' numerous school feasts and gipsey parties. Sometimes she would emulate these, by taking all the girls to some farm-house or rural spot, where they would drink tea in the open air, after spending the afternoon in botanizing or sketching. I had found it expedient to keep a couple of cows; we already had a paddock and a stable, and I made an arrangement with a good sort of old man, our gardener, to look after them. Sometimes we had tea or curds-and-whey on our own bowling-green.

How easy it is to make children happy ! How simple their amusements and pleasures ! I have often been repaid by as bright and grateful a smile for a few sweet-pea seeds, a sheet of coloured note-paper, or a little scrap

of ribbon or silk, *given at the right moment*, as I could have been for presents of great price.

On the second of Marian's holiday excursions, I was a little surprised by Mary Barnet timidly requesting permission to remain with me.

"I am not a very good walker," said she, "and it will be *such* a pleasure if I may stay with you."

I looked at her doubtfully, for I had never before heard any complaint of her walking, but immediately granted her request, which I now incline to think, was made partly on my own account and partly on hers; for, when we were left to spend a long afternoon with one another, I found her shaking up my sofa cushions, arranging my shawl, and watching my looks "as a handmaiden watcheth the eye of her mistress." On the other hand, she

made good use of her opportunity by tempting me into long and unreserved conversation ; telling me of all her little projects for the comfort of her father and the benefit of his household and parish ; and asking my advice on a good many really knotty points. In return, I drew out from her much about her home, her mother's illness, and her father's trials and fatigues, manfully borne, that greatly interested me. Now and then a quiet tear stole down the good girl's cheek ; I pressed her hand, and she once kissed mine.

Dear Mary ! I believe we were both sorry when our colloquy ceased ; indeed, she said as much, and I felt it. But they were renewed from time to time, though not often. Her father could not spare her to us beyond Christmas.

CHAPTER X.

Serene will be our days, and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security !
And they a blissful course may hold
E'en now, who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed,
Yet seek thy firm support, according to their need.

Ode to Duty.

THUS, though we made no distinctions, we each had our favourite. Mary Barnet was mine and Jacintha's; Fanny Ward was Marian's. I liked Rose Callender, indeed, almost as much as Mary, but she was not so isolated, nor her position so interesting. She had a mother, father, and sister, in full health and prosperity. I never saw her shed, nor need to shed a tear: indeed, her affections, never

much called forth, lay dormant ; she was loving and kind, but not susceptible. Intellect, genius, were what she most admired in others and most desired for herself, and she was endowed with both, and with their indispensable handmaiden, industry. A more laborious, painstaking girl could not be found ; she aimed at excellence for its own pure sake, while Mary Barnet sympathised, and Henrietta looked on in wonder.

The home-influences of these sisters were not favourable. Mrs. Callender, a bosom friend of Mrs. Forsyth's, was a thoroughly frivolous woman ; and like many frivolous women, had a strong will and imperious temper. Having won her own husband by her beauty, and considering marriage the grand desideratum, her girls heard a great deal too much about beauty and fortune, and the comparative values of various accomplishments in the match-making market.

“ You must leave off poking, Rose, or you’ll never get married ! ” and similar threats were frequently uttered : and the wonder was that the girls were so little hurt by them.

“ Rose has talents, and Rose’s talents must be brought forward,” said Mrs. Callender to me peremptorily, “ for her father values them—and so do many men ; and they enhance the value of beauty though they can’t supply it. Rose is not plain, thank goodness ! she has her father’s eye, and her father’s brow ; but she will never have Henrietta’s grace and elegance.”

Jacintha’s singing—(it is surprising how its fame had spread ! in a great measure, doubtless, owing to Mrs. Forsyth’s little parties)—had been Mrs. Callender’s grand attraction to us ; other, and, as she would class them, inferior attainments, she cared very little about. “ She could quite rely on us—she was sure she

might place confidence in any friends of Mrs. Forsyth's, only don't let Rose get into any poking ways, nor let Henrietta fatigue herself with too hard lessons."

To Mrs. Callender's recommendation (before she had had any experience of our deserts) we owed Margaret Forest, who was also a West Indian, a motherless girl, alternately spoilt and neglected by her father, who was very glad to get her off his hands. Thus, Jacintha's application to Mrs. Forsyth had ultimately brought us three pupils ; two of them very nice ones.

Week after week found us constantly, usefully, and cheerfully employed ; and continual exclamations were made at the days growing short sooner than usual. The only real pain we received was from one or two communications from John, relating to my father, which were of a distressing nature. But there was nothing we could do, except pray for him ; and

that, I will venture to say, we all did. The thorn in our hearts kept us awake sometimes at night, but was hidden or unfelt by day.

At length, the Christmas holidays drew so near, that preparations for them were busily making. We were to have a gay breaking-up party ; all the home-presents were to be exhibited on a Christmas-tree ; show pieces were to be played, sung, and recited, and a French charade performed. The house was full of smiles, that continually broke into laughter : under that influence of cheerful expectation, how much was achieved ! Jacintha and Marian quite revelled in their work, and the pleasures of their own approaching holiday sank into secondary consideration.

The grand day arrived : lessons were suspended, that various little preparations might be made ; and while Marian and Miss Dixon were busied in the school-room, and I in my

parlour, Jacintha went out to execute certain important errands. I was alone with Hawkins, giving out sweetmeats, when she returned.

"Isabella!" said she hurriedly. I looked up, and instantly saw something was the matter.

"You can go, Hawkins," said I; "I will ring when I want you."

"What is it?" continued I, as soon as Hawkins had retreated; "you are ill, and as pale as death."

"Oh, I'm not ill!" gasped she; and the next instant her cheeks were like carmine. She turned her face away, and concealed it with her hand. "That is,—I'm *not* very well, I believe!"

"I will get you a glass of wine," said I, going to a side-table where Hawkins had just placed two full decanters, and a tray of our best glass. I filled a wine-glass, and carried it to her.

"Thank you!" and she gulped, rather than

sipped a little. “It’s so very foolish of me!” trying to laugh. “And all about nothing—only because I happened to see an acquaintance—only—” and her lip quivered.

I was *sure* of the name, and yet feared to name it.

“Only Mr. Mortlake,” said she in a careless tone that was accompanied by a burning blush.

“Oh, indeed,” said I, looking another way, and speaking quietly. “So you met him—”

“I can hardly say I met him,” said Jacintha, loosening her bonnet strings and then her collar. “He drove past me, and our eyes happened to meet. I recognised him directly, and bowed, and *he* bowed too.”

“Dear me!” cried I, “he will be calling here presently, doubtless. My dear Jacintha, he must have come here on purpose to see *you*!”

"Oh, nonsense, that can't be," said she, fluttered, and looking very pleased.

"Why not? Does he know anybody here?"

"Not that I am aware of—oh, perhaps he *may* call, just to—"

"Depend upon it, he will!—with some note from Laura, or message from John, just by way of excuse."

"Excuse? Dear Isabella, why should he want an excuse?"

"Why, indeed?" cried I. "None is wanting, I'm sure; only he might be glad of one just by way of introduction. Dear me, how fortunate that he should come to-day of all others, when everything is in nice order!"

"Fortunate, indeed!" echoed Jacintha, starting up, all smiles. "And that reminds me I have a thousand things to do, and must set about them while I have time. If he calls before I am ready, *you* will receive him, Isabella."

“To be sure I will,” said I, arranging myself a little at the glass; “and I’ll tell you what, Jacintha—I shall invite him to our party!”

“Just as you like!” cried she gaily, and, the next instant was gone. In a high state of pleasurable excitement, I set about preparing to receive my future brother-in-law.

There were many things yet requiring to be done—Hawkins was already tapping at the door.

“Come in, Hawkins,” said I. I thought we would attack every difficulty at once, and then the bustle would be over.

“We shall want more sugar, ma’am, for the negus.”

“Very well, Hawkins.”

“And them little apples, ma’am, for the wassail-bowl—cook says they’re a deal too small for roasting.”

“The smaller the better, Hawkins. Crab-apples are the real thing.”

“Are they to be sent up in a dish, ma’am?”

“Dear me, no! The spice must be tied in a bit of muslin, to be afterwards taken out, the eggs well beaten with the hot wine, and frothed with a chocolate mill—the apples put in the last thing, to float at the top.”

“Certainly,” said Hawkins, “if the apples is to be put in the tankard, the littler they are, the better.”

“The tankard! No, no, Hawkins! not the silver tankard, but my grandfather’s punch-bowl! We are not going to have a ‘cool tankard,’ but a wassail-bowl piping hot!”

“Then, if the young ladies is to partake of it, ma’am, I should say, a little water,” suggested Hawkins.

“Well—perhaps a bottle of water to two bottles of wine,” said I, reluctantly.

“ Better be half-and-half, ma’am,” remonstrated the prudent Hawkins. “ Their little heads is no ways used to anything stronger than weak tea or coffee, and it would be a pity to make them ache, to-night of all nights in the year.”

“ Perhaps it had better be so,” said I; “ but you must measure it carefully, and be sure you don’t make it *too* weak ; and let there be plenty of sugar and spice and all that’s nice, and serve it very hot and frothy, with a silver ladle in it.”

“ Then, ma’am, if you will please in the next place to remember the strawberry-jam for the stone-creams.”

“ Hawkins, will you ask Miss Jacintha for her keys ?” interrupted Marian, looking in.

“ Marian ! Come in !” cried I. And, the moment Hawkins was gone, “ What do you think has happened ?” said I, excitedly.

“I can’t think!” said Marian, surprised.

“Mr. Mortlake is come!”

“Mr. Mortlake?” repeated Marian, with a vivid blush. “Where is he?” in a subdued, eager voice.

“Doubtless he will be *here* soon. Jacintha saw him drive up the street!”

“And *he*—”

“He bowed!—*she* bowed!”

“Dear!—”

“He *can* but have come for one purpose.”

“To see her, do you mean?”

“And propose!”

“Oh, Isabella! you are surely jumping to conclusions too rapidly—you make my head spin!” cried Marian.

“Well,—I may be premature,” said I, cooling down a little, “but I think it will come to that at last; and I am sure she thinks so too.”

“What has she said?” inquired Marian, eagerly.

“She has told me to receive him for her if he comes before she has finished dressing ; and when I boldly said I should invite him to come in the evening, she looked highly pleased.”

“Nay, then, there must be something in it,” said Marian. “You dear Jacintha ! how well you look !” giving a hearty caress and kiss to Jacintha,—who just then entered, in very becoming demi-toilette,—and then leaving the room.

“*Do I look well?*” said Jacintha, smiling, and glancing at her reflection in the mirror. “I believe this French blue becomes me—it was a very kind present of John’s. But, Isabella, there really are many things I *must* look to, come who may ; therefore I think I had better see to them at once ; and if any one calls, you can send for me, you know.”

“Yes, yes ; I’ll send,” said I, heartily—and

she went off quite secure of her sisters' sympathy and co-operation.

Having completed my arrangements, I repaired to the drawing-room, and took up my show knitting, impatiently listening for the visitors' bell.

The dinner-bell rang instead. It was a disappointment. The girls gathered merrily round the table for their last dinner before breaking-up, and Jacintha, in brilliant looks, was yet a little fatigued and feverish. I saw her drink a tumbler of water with avidity, but she could not eat.

There was a great deal of chattering and laughing, but chiefly among the younger ones. Mary Barnet was always quiet, even in her enjoyment, and she was thinking much more of our parting than of the Christmas-tree. A tear shone in her eye as she looked towards me.

Margaret Forest was surly at having no dis-

tinguished part to take in the proceedings of the evening, owing to her own idleness ; and she scowled vindictively at Fanny and Emma, who tried to smooth her down. How we make or mar our own pleasant hours !

The afternoon was all hurry and bustle. It was an anxious one to me. I need not add, to Jacintha. Once, when I touched her hand, it was so burning !

“ Do have a glass of wine,” said I.

“ Of water you mean,” said she, going to the water caraffe and pouring some into a tumbler. “ Delicious ! I’m quite restored now. Don’t look so concerned, Isabella. I’ve had a little disappointment, that’s all.” And she went away cheerily, though I know her heart was heavy.

Well,—no visitor came. Dressing-time arrived, and no visitor came. I arrayed myself in my best, the lamps were lit, the fires built

up, the girls, in their best dresses, dropped in two or three at a time, smiling and gathering round me or dispersing about the room. Great expectations were formed of the Christmas-tree, which no one had yet seen but Jacintha and Marian, though all had contributed to its fruits : it was to burst on us, by and by, in all its glory.

Then our evening visitors began to arrive : Jacintha and Marian joined the circle, each, to my partial eyes, looking very lovely. And Jacintha carried off her disappointment so well that it was difficult to believe she had had one.

Among our guests was Mrs. Meade. It was a singular event, her coming to an evening reception of ours, and we felt the compliment accordingly. I longed to sit beside her, and chat with her the whole evening. But that would never do ; we both knew it ; and she smiled and pressed my hand when I said some-

thing regretful about it, replying, “No, no ; you have other claims—we shall get a little chat by and by.”

I trusted we should ; and I placed the Reverend Mr. Barnet beside her, knowing that two such good and sensible people must have topics in common. Nor was I mistaken ; I soon saw them in earnest conversation, that seemed alternately cheerful and serious ; and, though I could not hear a word, I caught an occasional tone, that I was sure bespoke mutual pleasure.

Mary Barnet was to return home with her father after supper. His vicarage was ten miles off, and they had a long, cold drive before them. Meanwhile she was playing and singing her best duets with Jacintha, and her father listening with gratified pride and affection in his eyes. Mrs. Meade was expressing her approval to him, I knew, from the little

bow and smile he bestowed on her in return. Then Rose Callender played, and Mr. Barnet and Mrs. Meade quietly resumed their talking, not so as to interrupt. One girl exhibited her proficiency after another; at length I heard Mr. Ward say to Marian—

“But, Miss Marian, we have not heard *your* voice to-night.”

“Oh, no!” said Marian, gaily; “I am not going to enrapture you this evening. I am going to light the tapers on the Christmas-tree!”

And, presently, the ringing of a small silver-toned bell was succeeded by the updrawing of a mysterious green curtain that hitherto had divided a certain portion of the room from the rest. It ascended majestically, forming into splendid festoons, and revealed to our delighted eyes the Christmas-tree, blazing with tapers, surmounted by a glorious star, and

bearing on its sturdy branches sweetmeats, gilt walnuts, gay ribbons, purses, neck-ties, delicately worked sleeves and collars, and a variety of other handiworks, too numerous to mention. Jacintha played soft music: Mr. Ward clapped his hands, which was emulated by the rest till a noble round of applause was produced; and then all the company drew near the tree to investigate its decorations, and read with interest the names on the labels which announced to whom each gift was appropriated. Many found their own name, and exclamations of surprise and delight accompanied the removal of their presents from the tree.

While all but Mrs. Meade and myself were thus engaged, she, with a significant smile, placed herself beside me, and, again pressing my hand, said—

“Now, the time is come for our little chat.

How nicely everything has gone off! What a gratifying evening this must be to you and your dear sisters! How pleasantly the girls have gone through their various little performances—so modestly, unaffectedly, and with such quiet self-possession! That excellent Mr. Barnet appears fully to appreciate the advantages his daughter has received here. He says she has sprung up from a girl into a young woman. He seems quite to reckon on her as the companion of his evenings, and his assistant in his multifarious duties."

"Mary is so good a girl," said I, "that I am persuaded he will not reckon on her in vain."

Here she came up to us, smiling, and said, "Miss Middlemass, there are so many things belonging to you hanging on the Christmas tree unclaimed!"

"Is it possible?" cried I, rising with secret

reluctance ; but Mary affectionately offered me her arm, and I could not hang back.

In another ten minutes I was again at Mrs. Meade's side.

"I tried," said she, smiling, "to bring a friend with me this evening, who would, I thought, be a not unpleasing addition to your circle ; but, unfortunately, he could not be persuaded."

"Mr. Meade?" said I.

"No ; a Mr. Mortlake."

"Mr. Mortlake!" I involuntarily repeated.

"An old acquaintance of my husband's, rather than of mine. He happened to be passing through the town on business ; called on his old friend, and lunched with us. He asked me if there were not some sisters of a friend of his, Mr. John Middlemass, here. I replied, Yes, and that I was going to join a breaking-up party at your house this very

evening, and said that, as he was a friend of your brother's, I should have no hesitation in taking him with me, if he liked; but he suddenly turned very shy, and, after one or two inquiries, declined. I told him he was punishing himself, for I knew he would like you."

CHAPTER XI.

I seem like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted ;
Whose guests are fled,
Whose garlands, dead,
And all but he departed.

MOORE.

I WAS perplexed by this : there seemed a hitch somewhere.

“Jacintha saw Mr. Mortlake in passing,” said I, “so it is a pity he did not accompany you, for I think he is rather a favourite of my brother’s. Perhaps he will be more courageous to-morrow, when we are not so formidable a party.”

“Oh, no,” said Mrs. Meade, “he returned to town this afternoon.”

Here was a blow ! She little knew she had

given one; and went on to speak unconcernedly on other subjects. But, after all, what harm was done? Jacintha was disappointed of a pleasant visitor, and my little castle in the air, which Marian had told me was absurd, was demolished. But could not Mr. Mortlake pass through a town on business without exciting expectations? There was nothing in it—or, at least, there would have been nothing suspected, but for Jacintha's evident emotion.

Even now I could see her glancing towards the door whenever it opened; and I knew, or thought I knew, that she was seemingly occupied in one thing and really in another. I lost sight of her among a group, and in her place beheld the smiling, heart-whole Marian, pleasing and pleased, whatever she said, did, or looked, and followed by the loving eyes of several of her partial scholars.

"What a charming creature she is!" said Mrs. Meade, as if in answer to my thoughts. "You are happy, my dear friend, in your sisters!"

Here Mrs. Cole sailed up to us, to congratulate me patronizingly on the performances that decorated the Christmas-tree; and when I turned round, I found that Mrs. Meade had gone to examine it.

Supper followed, and then the party broke up. I accompanied Mary Barnet into the hall to receive her tearful farewell: her father warmly shook my hand, and hoped she might be privileged to consider me her friend for life. A good deal of time was lost, after the last guest had disappeared, before the prayer-bell could be rung, and we could gather soberly, and sleepily, in my morning-room, for our last evening family service. Some may say, why not send the poor tired children and servants

to bed without prayers? No, I would not do that: we had had a happy evening, a prosperous and profitable half-year; many casualties might occur before we met, if we *ever* all met again. A few brief words of thankfulness, of entreaty for forgiveness of all past sins of omission and commission, of continued grace and blessing, sent us all with chastened cheerfulness to our night's rest.

Jacintha said "good-night" directly after prayers, and I saw her no more. Soon the whole house was silent.

The next morning, while I was dressing, and turning many things in my mind, some one tapped at my door. I said, "Come in," and Jacintha entered in her dressing-gown, with a letter in her hand. Our letters were delivered the first thing in the morning: we could read them in our bedrooms.

"This is very singular, Isabella," said she,

with a troubled air, and sitting down as she spoke: "here is a letter from Laura, who speaks of Mr. Mortlake coming here and certainly intending to see me."

"His heart must have failed him," said I. "Cheer up, he may come yet. He called on Mrs. Meade yesterday."

"On Mrs. Meade! And you never told me!"

"My dear Jacintha, how could I? You slipped off to bed the moment prayers were over."

"That's true. Do tell me what she said!"

"It was just when the Christmas-tree was first lighted up. She told me she had been very near bringing a friend with her uninvited, relying on our kind reception of him—a Mr. Mortlake."

"I wish she had!" cried Jacintha. "Why did not she?"

"He would not come—he said he must return to town."

“Stupid! tiresome! And did he?”

“Yes—she supposed so.”

“Ah, well, there’s no use worrying about it!” said she, giving a deep sigh. “‘Men were deceivers ever.’ There must be some strange vacillation in his character.—To think of Mrs. Meade’s knowing him, all this while!”

“She knows very little of him; but he is an old acquaintance of her husband’s.”

“Does she like him?”

“She said she thought we should have found him an agreeable addition to our party.”

“Ah! there can be no doubt about that,” said Jacintha, with another deep sigh; and starting up, she hurried away.

It was a busy day, of course—people coming or going, till the last girl had departed. Then the housemaids swept away the litter of dust, ends of cord, bits of straw, crumpled sheets of brown paper, consequent on wholesale

packing up, and we drew round a good fire in the drawing-room just as it was growing dusk, and established ourselves in our old places.

Jacintha was sadly out of spirits : Marian was cheerful and talkative : she and I had to sustain the conversation between us, for I would not damp her harmless mirth, and I hoped by degrees to cheer Jacintha.

We were all very tired ; but we unanimously agreed that the half-year had been well got through, and might be looked back on with honest pride. Also the party of the previous evening had been a success, and had given much pleasure to all. Finally, I was full of hope that when our Christmas bills were paid, and our earnings duly received, we should find ourselves a handsome sum in pocket. On these pleasing subjects, and on various little incidents and traits of character, we chatted very much to our mutual satisfaction till we went to bed.

The next morning Jacintha suddenly entered my room without tapping. Her hair was hanging over her shoulders, and again a letter was in her hand.

“Oh, Isabella!” said she, almost wildly, “such news!” and, dropping into a seat, she burst into tears.

“My father!” exclaimed I.

“Oh no, no! Mr. Mortlake—” and she sobbed.

“What is it? what is the matter?” said Marian, pale as ashes, hastily entering and closing the door. Her room was on the same floor, and she had heard Jacintha’s entry and agitated voice.

“It’s all owing to that Mrs. Meade!” sobbed Jacintha, passionately. “That hateful woman!”

“Mrs. Meade!” repeated I, in amaze.

“Yes—she told him!”

“Told him what?”

“That—that we kept a school!”

“Oh, Jacintha! and had not *you*?” ejaculated Marian.

“How should I? Why should I? What concern was it of mine?—of his, I mean?” cried Jacintha with fiery eyes, and cheeks like scarlet.

“Even independent of truth,” said I, “how could you hope to conceal it from him?”

“I didn’t” (she was almost choking with tears of rage and grief); “there was no deception in the case. I neither told him one thing nor another. Was I to go about, saying ‘I keep a school’ to everybody I met in Guernsey?”

“No, certainly not; only—”

“Laura said there was no need whatever for him to know; and I thought the same. We did not know, then, it would come to anything

serious. And, when it appeared more likely," continued the weeping Jacintha, "I tried to get it out a thousand times, but I could not, and I knew it would come out somehow, and thought he might as well learn it from any one else as from me. Oh, this horrid school!"

"Does he, then, hate schools so much?" said Marian timidly.

"I rather suspect he more hates concealment," said I, thoughtfully. "Depend on it, he has a noble character."

"What signifies his noble character?" cried Jacintha. "It will never be anything to me!" and she cried bitterly.

"Tell us how all this has come about," said I, taking her hand. "Is the letter from Mr. Mortlake?"

"Oh no, no! from Laura." And she put it into my hand. Marian leant over my shoulder, and we both read it silently.

It was the first epistolary effusion of Mrs. Middlemass's that I had seen, and I cannot say it heightened my opinion of her. In the first place, the handwriting was poor—and I am influenced by handwriting; secondly, even her orthography was not always correct; thirdly, her style was inelegant. Moreover, style is the voice of thought; and the thoughts and feelings expressed by my sister-in-law were very unsatisfactory. All these conclusions I arrived at, by the way, while rapidly possessing myself of the facts in her letter. Stripped of much flimsy verbiage they were these:—Mr. Mortlake had, as Laura had often assured her dear Jacintha, admired Jacintha from the very first. He was a cool, reflective man, and would not offer his hand till he saw his way clearly before him. Then he went to Mrs. Middlemass (who acknowledged, or rather boasted that she had never allowed him to forget his interest in

Jacintha), and told her he was coming down to Bayford.

“As he was close, I was close,” wrote Mrs. John. “As he said nothing about his interest in you, I said nothing about the school. Of course, as *you* had not, it was no affair of mine. Let the man find it out for himself when he could! Well, he went down, he saw you in the street, he went to his friend (I cannot call her *your* friend) Mrs. Meade, told her he was going to call on you, and what must she do but blurt it out that you kept a school; *had* kept one for some time—even before he first saw you in Guernsey! What does Mr. Mortlake do, but turn sulky on the spot, give up his intentions, post up to London, and then come and upbraid *me*, of all creatures in the world, with having kept him in the dark! And when I said it was no affair of mine, and after all, where was the harm?—he said, *no* harm, in

keeping a school, but great harm in your having concealed it, and that it so altered his opinion of your character, and I don't know what all, that the illusion was dispelled, and he no longer felt you to be worth the seeking."

"Ah, I feared that was it," murmured I.

"Then I know how far you have read!" said Jacintha, rousing up. "Oh, *don't* you pity me?" And she threw herself into my arms.

"Most sincerely, my dear Jacintha." And I pressed her to my heart. Marian's tears were *her* only answer.

"Oh, *don't* you think I have been hardly used?"

"Severely punished, I must own, my poor, dear sister."

"Nay, unjustly used! cruelly used! Oh, that abominable Mrs. Meade!"

"Hush, Mrs. Meade has had nothing to do with it."

"Mrs. Meade has had *everything* to do with it! I shall consider that woman my worst enemy as long as I live! So spiteful! so *mean!*"

"Jacintha, you are quite wrong. Mrs. Meade told me, quite innocently, what had passed, and her relation bore much more the air of truth than Laura's. She is not a woman to *blurt* things out, as Laura vulgarly expresses it. On the contrary, with the kindest intentions, she invited her husband's friend to accompany her to a school feast, merely for the purpose of giving him a pleasant evening, without even knowing, up to that time, that he was acquainted with a family of the name of Middlemass; and when he said he was, and questioned her about us, to be sure we were that family, her suspicions were still unaroused, and she merely thought him shy and unsociable. You yourself, on hearing of her invitation to

him, said you wished he had accepted it. *Had* he done so, the truth must at once have become known to him, even had he been ignorant of it before."

"Oh that he had but come!" interrupted Jacintha, clasping her hands in anguish. "A look—a smile—a tear—and all would have been forgiven. *All?* So trivial a fault!—so harmless, so natural a concealment, to blight one's prospects for life? Oh, it is too, too hard!"

And, with a fresh burst of passionate grief, she started up and quitted the room.

Marian and I looked at one another in sorrow.

"It is a bitter disappointment," said I, "and the worst of it is that it has been her own fault. How differently you behaved with regard to Mr. Francis Duncan! Oh, Marian! let this be a lesson to you—nay, to us both! to us all!—never to be insincere, even in matters apparently trivial."

Marian sighed deeply. She did not need the monition, for she was candour itself.

When we reassembled at breakfast, Jacintha's eyes were red, and she hardly spoke. She remained inconsolable all day. She could not even make up her mind to call on her friend, Mrs. Forsyth. She wrote a long letter to Laura, I conclude, in her own room, and posted it herself. All the evening she was silent and unsociable. The next day she was excessively cross : inveighed much against Mrs. Meade, said testy things to Marian and me, and was harsh to the servants. I was very glad that Marian was engaged to spend the evening with the Wards, though Jacintha told her she lowered herself by doing so, and disgraced her connexions. The idea of Marian being a disgrace to any one !

The dear girl took it very meekly. She knew exactly to what to attribute it, and made

allowance. Previously to the breaking-up John had very kindly invited Marian to spend the holidays at his house, and Marian had declined, knowing how gladly Jacintha would fill her place, and affirming (with perfect truth, I am convinced,) that she cared very little for town gaieties, and preferred being with me. John did not press the point, but immediately transferred his invitation to Jacintha, who gladly accepted it.

Now, however, affairs were changed. In answer to Jacintha's impetuous letter, came a very cool one from Laura, saying that, fault or no fault, it was no good to repent what had been done now, or to throw blame on any one: the thing was done and could not be undone; and it would be fruitless for Jacintha to buoy herself up with hopes of setting things straight by coming to town, for Mr. Mortlake had gone to Paris. Jacintha was hurt at Laura's

supposing she was buoying herself up by any hopes of the kind, and thought her saying so was indelicate and unfeeling. In short, all the prestige of the London visit was gone—she resolved not to go, and wrote to say so. Mrs. Middlemass, no whit chagrined, invited two of her own sisters instead, who were, she said, dying to spend the winter in London. Thereafter, letters to and from Mrs. Middlemass were much less frequent.

Care fed on Jacintha's damask cheek. She must have been very deeply attached to this man, for whom, though I had never seen him, this occurrence had inspired me with great respect. She became morose, captious, and with frequent attacks of low spirits. I don't believe she disburthened her mind to Mrs. Forsyth; she paid her frequent visits, however, and this seemed the only thing that gave her pleasure during the holidays. But

Mrs. Forsyth was less a favourite than of old: probably she had taken up some newer favourite to be the attraction to her select parties. Jacintha was only asked to two of them, and each time to meet people whom she knew were in Mrs. Forsyth's second-best set; moreover, she took it into her head that she was asked for the sake of her voice, and that Mrs. Forsyth assumed a higher tone to her than formerly. She returned displeased with her treatment, and declared that she would refuse Mrs. Forsyth's next invitation. But another invitation never came: which did not improve Jacintha's temper or spirits.

In short, our Christmas holidays were clouded. Jacintha cared very little for what gaiety came in her way, and yet complained of monotony with irritation. Marian took what offered in the way of recreation, but her resources were within herself, and she could

always be quietly happy, if free from anxiety concerning those she loved. That was not quite the case now; for her efforts to enliven Jacintha fell flat, though she did not on that account abandon them.

CHAPTER XII.

Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful Winter in.

COWPER: *The Task.*

JACINTHA was buried in the depths of a luxurious easy-chair—buried also in gloomy thought; Marian was intently manufacturing some wonderful creation of her own; while I, pen in hand, and with certain business-like files and tradesmen's books around me, was immersed in profound calculations.

“How much,” said I at length, leaning back and drawing a deep breath, “how much

do you suppose we have cleared this half-year?"

"A hundred pounds," said Marian, at random.

"Marian!—You absurd child!"

"Two hundred then," said Jacintha, recklessly.

"Worse and worse!" cried I.

"Worse!" repeated Jacintha. "Have we not then even cleared a miserable hundred pounds?"

"We have exactly paid our expenses."

Marian raised her eyes from her work. Jacintha started to her feet. I never saw any one look so aghast.

"Do you mean," said she, in a voice trembling with suppressed indignation, "that we have had all the fag, worry, and disgrace of this wretched school without being one penny into pocket?"

“Be calm, my dear Jacintha: there is no disgrace attaching to this school; on the contrary, it has won for us consideration and commendation sufficient of themselves to repay us for our trouble.”

“That is quite true,” assented Marian, in an under tone.

“The idea!” exclaimed Jacintha, exasperated; “the idea of all this hideous toil and trouble to no good!”

“No good?”

“Why, you say we have not cleared a penny!”

“True, but we have paid our way. You forget that had we not kept a school, or done something equivalent to it, we could not have paid our way. We must have been John’s pensioners.”

“That’s true,” said Jacintha in a softened tone. “But oh!—to have had all this toil and

care, this ceaseless strain on mind and body, this wear of temper and spirits, this blighting of earthly prospects—and for no reward—only mere daily bread! *It is hard!*"

She covered her face with her hands. I knew she was silently weeping. I grieved; but what could I say?

"Perhaps you have made some mistake, Isabella," said Marian. "People do, sometimes."

"Certainly they do," said I; "but I am afraid I have made none here. Run over the figures yourself."

Marian took the paper, and went over the calculation once, twice—thrice.

"Yes," said she, looking up with her sweet smile, "I would not say so till I had gone over it three times. You have made a mistake of just forty pounds."

"Forty pounds!" repeated Jacintha, laugh-

ing in spite of herself. “That makes a world of difference !”

“Upon my word, I’m very glad of it,” said I.

“Glad ? Yes ; but, my dear Isabella, what a miserable reckoner you must be !”

“Well, we are all liable to mistakes. Perhaps Marian has made one.”

“Do give me the paper, Marian !” said Jacintha, stretching out her hand.

“I can easily see where Isabella made the mistake,” said Marian apologetically, as if the blunder were her own, or she had taken a great liberty in finding it out.

Jacintha contracted her brows, but made no answer till she, too, had gone over the account three times.

“Yes !” said she, clearing up ; “Marian is right enough. You abominable Isabella, to give me such a fright ! I was just going to

tell you it was no more than might have been expected, from your luncheon cakes, your French rolls, your junkettings, and your extravagances of all sorts."

"It is well, then, you did not," said I, with complacence.

"Just so; but, while we are on the subject, do you really think, my dear Isabella, your housekeeping may not be too liberal?"

"With a residue of forty pounds the first half?" said I, triumphantly.

"The first three-quarters. We began, you know, at Easter."

"Still, if it were for the twelvemonth, it would be no bad balance."

"Hum—I don't know."

"Oh no, Jacintha, the comforts of the school-room must be attended to. I can't pinch the girls, or set distasteful things before them. I would sooner keep school ten

years the longer. We were once girls ourselves."

"At no such very distant date, surely, Miss Isabella!" said Jacintha.

"Oh, it's long, long ago," said Marian with mock dolefulness. "I'm sure I feel quite decrepid."

"Well, we shall certainly not dub Isabella Professor of Arithmetic if she live to the age of Methusaleh!" said Jacintha laughing.

I was so glad to hear her laugh like her old self!

No pupil had offered to supply Mary Barnet's place. We therefore recommenced with eleven.

School-keeping revealed more of its harder features this half-year. It was a bitterly cold January; early rising was all the more trying to those who loved their warm beds; and Jacintha had always been one of them. She used

to come down, looking pinched, cold, and too often cross : and crossness in principals always re-acts on subordinates. I now and then heard peevish tones. Moreover, one or two girls were generally on the sick list with colds, sore-throats, tooth-ache, and chilblains. We were afraid that a bad swelled face would prove a case of mumps ; but luckily it was not ; and though Hawkins and I had plenty to do in the way of coddling, we as yet kept the doctor out of the house.

But a very unpleasant thing occurred, that perplexed and harassed us sadly. Two or three small thefts were committed, and we could not detect the culprit. One girl missed a silver pencil-case ; another a scent-bottle ; another a small fruit-knife ; and though Jacintha accused the losers of carelessness, and was sure their losses must have been owing to their own negligence or forgetfulness, she did not think so

when she missed a vinaigrette of her own that had been given her by Mrs. Middlemass.

“This is going too far!” said she with decision. “A search must be made.”

A search was accordingly made, in all the bedrooms and sitting-rooms, to no purpose. Hawkins then came forward and begged that it might extend to the servants’ rooms, as she said they were much hurt at being suspected.

In vain I assured her that I did not suspect them : she said Miss Jacintha did, which was as bad ; and, as Jacintha did not deny it, my saying so went for nothing. Jacintha accepted the challenge, and then repented of it, leaving the search half made. No good came of this investigation, but some harm ; the maids did not consider themselves cleared, and there was a general feeling of dissatisfaction and distrust. Even Hawkins, though she said little, had a look of discontent.

Then Margaret Forest, that disagreeable child! said she had not, nor ever *had* had enough to eat. Again the household loaf was placed on the table; and again she crumbled and wasted the bread. Again, therefore, the loaf was not brought up.

The day that it ceased to be placed on the table was a memorable one for a more important reason. As Emma Grove stood beside Jacintha at the head of her class, she drew out her hand-kerchief from her pocket, and with it, unwittingly, Jacintha's vinaigrette, which fell on the floor!

“What’s this?” cried Jacintha in amaze. Emma, seeing the vinaigrette, coloured like scarlet—then became deadly pale.

“Stand back, young ladies!” cried Jacintha. “You all see what it is! You all saw where it came from! Miss Dixon, go and call Miss Middlemass!”

All stood transfixed. Miss Dixon came to me with the longest face I ever saw, and in a lugubrious voice, said, "You're wanted, ma'am, in the school-room, please!"

I saw directly that something was the matter, and repaired thither without a word. The first thing I saw was Marian's perturbed face—then Jacintha, standing in a commanding attitude, the girls all looking uncomfortable around her.

"Isabella!" cried Jacintha, in a raised voice, "here's my vinaigrette come to light at last! Where do you think it was? In Emma Grove's pocket!"

"You don't think I knew it was there, Miss Middlemass!" cried Emma, bursting into tears.

"I don't think you meant to draw it out with your handkerchief, certainly," said Jacintha, with cutting emphasis.

"Oh, hush, hush!" said I, taking the sobbing girl by the hand. "Jacintha, the pursuits of the morning must not be interrupted for this."

I take Emma in charge, and reserve the matter for private inquiry."

"As you will," said Jacintha, speaking quickly. "For my part I think publicity would be the only justice to all."

I led her away, without answering, into my room. I sat down on my sofa: Emma stood weeping beside me.

"Come, my dear, tell me all," said I softly, and taking her hand.

"All? But there's nothing to tell!" cried Emma, indignantly. "Search me! examine all my things!" And she hurriedly emptied her pocket into my lap. Among its contents, our eyes at the same moment fixed on the pencil-case! and then on each other. We both looked appalled.

"Somebody must have put these things in my pocket!" exclaimed Emma.

"There must be some great wickedness

somewhere," said I, looking steadfastly at her. "Why should anybody do such a cruel thing?"

"I can't imagine!" cried Emma. "I do not know that I have an enemy."

There was such innocence in her every look and tone that I never for a moment suspected her. I was greatly troubled.

"Now, Emma," said I, "you must see that this places us in a very unpleasant position."

"It places *me!*!" said Emma.

"All of us," rejoined I; "because, though I cannot for an instant do you the injustice to believe you guilty, I cannot, for the present, treat you as if you were innocent."

"Oh, Miss Middlemass!"

"No, Emma. Consider, my dear, how we are placed."

"Consider how *I* am placed, please!" cried she, weeping afresh.

“I do, I do. I hope and trust you will come forth from the ordeal without a speck of discredit, but till the guilty party is detected, the shadow of the guilt lies on you; and, for the sake of common justice, we must deal with you in some respects as we would with the lowest person in the house, till—”

“Oh, send me home, please!” interrupted Emma, sobbing; “send me home!”

At this moment we were joined by Jacintha, whose eye instantly darted on the pencil-case.

“Ha!” cried she snatching it up, and looking eagerly at it, “what is this?”

Her eye, as she spoke, fixed piercingly on Emma, who immediately seemed turned into stone. She saw Jacintha suspected her, and from that moment became silent, stubborn, and impenetrable.

I cannot go over that scene. It affects me too much. I can never bear to think of it.

What tears it has often cost me in the silent watches of the night !

Suffice it to say, that Jacintha was absolutely convinced that Emma Grove was the culprit, and inflexibly resolved to make her suffer as such—at least as far as common opinion and separation from her companions went; that Marian implored, and I insisted, that Mr. Grove (who was a widower) should be instantly requested to remove his daughter from our house. But twenty-four hours necessarily passed before he could do so; during which time I had Emma constantly in my charge by night as well as day. And as I could not possibly undertake two offices at once, all the searching, examining, questioning, &c., that went on for the purpose of throwing some light on this most painful matter, had to be gone through out of my presence, by my sisters. How they conducted it, I know not; I only know their

trouble was fruitless, and that Jacintha, alas ! spoke and acted far too much as if it were beyond question that Emma Grove was a hardened criminal.

It had a bad effect on the whole house. I could hear a great deal of subdued, eager talking in the kitchen, though I had given Hawkins a hint to check gossip on the subject as much as she could. The girls were of course in a high state of excitement, and most of them, if not all, very indignant at Emma's being suspected, though *who* the guilty party could be, none could divine, or, at any rate, would not divulge. Everything was done with divided attention : all minds were pre-occupied with the one subject. In fact, how could they be otherwise ?

As for Emma she cried herself to stone, and then maintained a dogged silence. I am sure the poor child lay awake half the night, for I

could hear her softly using her handkerchief under the bedclothes. At length, quite worn out, she slept heavily—which was more than I could.

During the ensuing long, long morning, I gave her some plain needlework to do, and applied myself to the same occupation in melancholy silence, only now and then addressing her in such language as, I thought, must touch her heart, whether innocent or guilty. At length she quickly said, “Oh, don’t, please!” in such a piteous accent, that I desisted.

Late in the afternoon a fly drove rapidly up to the door, and Mr. Grove alighted from it. He was in a towering passion, though but imperfectly acquainted with the details of the case; and his anger did not diminish when his poor girl, usually so undemonstrative, threw herself into his arms and sobbed on

his bosom. He would hear nothing ; he would only storm at us all round, in no measured terms, and, as Emma's box was already packed, it was soon placed on the fly, and they drove away in it a few minutes after his arrival : Jacintha to the last preserving her attitude of defiance, and I vainly reiterating my hopes that all would yet be cleared up satisfactorily.

One might almost have thought a death had occurred in the house, so mournful a stillness ensued. We ate our evening meal almost in silence ; those who did not look sorry, looked dull or cross.

When we reassembled for prayers I opened my Bible, but, before reading it, said—

“ Night is coming on—how hushed and still ! But there will be some aching hearts beneath this roof to-night. Darkness does not descend on us, as it has so often done before, on a peaceful, cheerful family. A great sin

has been committed; and as a loving, well-ordered family resembles the different members of a body under one head, one member of which cannot suffer without its being felt by the individual in whom all those members are united, so, with us, the sorrow of one is the sorrow of all; nay, in some respects, the shame of one is felt as the shame of all, till the disgrace can be effaced. Let us all then make common and fervent intercession for the unhappy person who has committed the great sin which now weighs so heavily on our hearts; bearing strongly in mind that each and all of us are sinners before Almighty God, however clear we may be of this particular offence, and that there is no hope for any one of us but through Him whose blood cleanseth from *all* sin.”

Then I read one of the shortest penitential psalms, and then prayed. Marian, Henrietta

Callender, and Hawkins silently wept. I know not if any one else did. All went off to their beds, serious and subdued ; Marian accompanying them. Jacintha remained to talk with me. She was still very hot about it ; and could not give up her belief in Emma's guilt, though she said she was the last girl in the school of whom she could have supposed it.

"Those quiet girls !—it is always they who require the most watching."

I did not believe this to be a true axiom. I had been a quiet girl myself. Still, the heart is desperately wicked—who shall know it ? save Him who made it. But my impression was, that Emma was innocent, whether she could ever be proved so or not. In this impression my arm had instinctively twined round her as she lay sleeping beside me in the night ; and when I awoke in the morning from the brief but dreamless slumber that at

length had given me a little rest, I had seen her gazing on me with such a wistful, piteous, look, that, though she closed her eyes the next moment, it sank into my heart.

I did not mention this little incident to Jacintha, but I did to Marian, who came down and had a long talk with me after Jacintha had gone to bed; and she was comforted by it, and said, "Oh, I am so glad she woke and found your arm round her! I am so very, very sorry Jacintha is so harsh, for I am sure Emma is innocent."

"Who, then, can be the offender?" said I.

"That I cannot imagine," said Marian, sadly. "I have talked to every one of the girls, seriously and separately, and I have since talked to every one of the servants. Each seems as guiltless as the others. It is a great mystery." And, sighing, she kissed me and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

These, shall the fury passions tear,
The vultures of the mind—
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,
And Shame, that skulks behind.
The stings of Falsehood those shall try,
And hard Unkindness' altered eye.

GRAY: *Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College.*

I REMAINED sitting by myself an hour or more, till I sat the fire quite out. With a heavy heart I then arose: an indefinite feeling of insecurity made me resolve to go over the house.

Painfully, slowly, and noiselessly, I descended the kitchen stairs. Jacintha usually looked to the fastenings, but to-night she had been pre-occupied, and had neglected to do so.

Every key was turned, however, every bolt drawn; but on entering the kitchen I perceived a smell of burning. A stone or piece of slate had exploded in the fire in the course of the evening, and a fragment of it had lain unperceived on the floor, one of the boards of which was just catching fire. I closed the door to exclude the draught, and lifting a heavy can of water, which under ordinary circumstances would have been beyond my strength, I poured its contents on the board till all was safe, without much minding the condition in which the servants would find the floor in the morning.

I have always been very thankful for this escape. Surely there is frequently something providential in these inward monitions of danger, that behoves us to look about us with more than ordinary circumspection. Had I not yielded to mine, we should probably have

all been burnt in our beds : an impenitent sinner among the rest.

Having seen that all was safe, I regained the upper floor panting ; and sat down for a minute or two, clasping my hands in silent thanksgiving. Then I resumed my survey, noiselessly pacing the carpeted gallery on which the bedrooms opened ; and as I did so, I bethought me of the Moravian vigils, who keep watch throughout the night in their large schools, silently moving along the corridors, or spending the long hours in reading and prayer.

On opening the first door I startled poor Miss Dixon, who was just rising from her knees at her bedside. I put my finger on my lips and quietly withdrew, sorry I had disturbed her.

In the next room, all were sleeping—one moaning in her sleep. I screened the light

from their eyes and stole away. The moonlight was streaming through the tall uncurtained window at the end of the gallery. I paused for a little, and looked out on our little garden and orchard, the dark spectral shadows of the trees broken by streaks of the white, ghastly light.

There was only one other room to visit—it was on the other side of the gallery, next to Jacintha's and opposite Miss Dixon's. Now that Emma was gone, only two girls slept in it—Alice Bicknell and Margaret Forest.

As I opened the door, I started violently on seeing a little white figure standing beside Alice's bed. The child started too, as if electrified, when the light of my night-lamp streamed in upon her; and dropping something from her left hand, which proved to be Alice's dress, that had been neatly folded on the chair, she hastily flung from her right

some small hard substance that fell against the fender with a click. At the same time, the hard, dark, deep-lined face of Margaret Forest was turned towards me with a look, the expression of which I shall never forget; and she sprang into her bed, and buried herself under the bedclothes.

I uttered a shrill cry of "Jacintha!" and setting down my lamp, hurried to the child, whose hand I perceived in quest of something under her pillow. I turned back the pillow and caught her closed hand by the wrist; her fingers were too firmly fixed for me to be able to unclasp them; but Jacintha and poor Miss Dixon were already at my side, and between Jacintha and Margaret ensued a silent, deadly struggle. I was turning quite faint, when, the next instant, Jacintha triumphantly held up the smelling-bottle with one hand, and held down Margaret with the other.

“Miss Dixon,” said I, hardly able to command my voice, “see what lies beside the fender.”

Miss Dixon looked about, and almost immediately picked up the fruit-knife, which she brought to me with a look of dismay. Poor Alice, half awake, sat up in her bed, looking round her in perplexity, not unmixed with fear.

“That completes the chain—the only link wanting!” exclaimed Jacintha. “How did you know it was there, Isabella?”

“When I entered the room she flung it there. She was in the act of putting it into Alice’s pocket.”

“Into my pocket? Oh the wicked creature!” cried little Alice, springing out of bed and coming close up to me.

“You detestable girl!” cried Jacintha, pressing her hand strongly down upon her.

“ You’re hurting me!—oh! oh!” roared Margaret.

“ I don’t care if I am,” said Jacintha: “ it is of no use biting me, Margaret; if you behave like a mad child you must be treated like one.”

Suddenly Margaret released herself from her grasp, and made a rush at the door, but Jacintha instantly had her arms round her from behind, pinioning Margaret’s to her side, as she victoriously carried her back to her bed, in spite of being unmercifully kicked all the while.

“ I am quite competent to the charge of this young fury,” said she with determination. “ Alice, my dear, I will trouble you to go to bed in my room—you and I will change quarters for to-night. Go, dear, go—go, Isabella. Just look in on Marian, and if she is awake, tell her the missing things are found,

and with whom. That poor, dear, injured Emma! I will go myself to Heatherton to-morrow, and tell her how completely she is cleared. I owe it to her. But we must get rid of this bad girl first. Good-night, good-night! Nothing can be done now."

I felt this was the case, and also that a wakeful night's quiet thought would prepare us for the busy action of the morrow. Margaret, even before we left the room, curled herself up like a centipede under the bedclothes. Jacintha locked the door the moment we had passed through it, and we left her alone in her glory. For she was fond of bending a stubborn will to her own.

I remained a minute or two outside, till I found all was still. In fact, Jacintha afterwards told me Margaret shammed going to sleep directly, and never spoke another word. Of course no child *could* sleep directly under

such circumstances. Poor innocent Emma could not !

Miss Dixon was trembling like a leaf, and very cold, for she was only in her thin night-dress. I begged her to return to bed immediately, and offered to bring her a glass of wine.

“ Oh no, ma’am, thank you,” replied she expressively, “ it’s only the flurry that makes me feel rather satirical” (hysterical, she meant.) “ I shall get over it directly. How fortunate it was, ma’am, that you found all out ! ”

“ May I sleep with Miss Dixon ? ” said the trembling little Alice.

“ You may sleep with *me*, love, if you will.”

“ Oh, thank you ! ”

And in another minute, the little creature was nestling in my bed. Meantime, I went softly to Marian’s door, but it was bolted : all was quiet within, and I rejoiced that the

night's rest she so much needed would not be broken.

I lay down beside my little companion, who could not immediately compose herself to sleep, but was eager to repeat how very wicked it had been of Margaret to try to make her appear a thief, and how glad she was I had prevented it.

"We are not worst at once, dear," said I. "Margaret perhaps stole these trinkets from the mere wish of possessing them, without thinking of the consequences. She has never known a dear mamma's care."

"Nor has Emma!"

"No, but Emma has been carefully brought up; has early been taught to know right from wrong, and not only to *know* what is right, but to practise it. I felt persuaded all along, that she *could* not have done this wicked thing; but appearances were so very much against her, that we should not have been justified in allow-

ing her to associate with her companions here, and it was therefore best she should go home."

"Yes, but how unhappy she must have been!" said Alice, sighing.

"She had at least the comfort of an approving conscience; and with that, I would sooner have been her than Margaret undetected."

"Oh yes! so would I," cried Alice.

"But Margaret," continued I, "has had very little pains bestowed on her moral and religious training, although her disposition is such as more than ordinarily to require it. If great pains are not bestowed on her, Alice, and if she does not take very great pains with herself, Margaret will, I fear, be a very unhappy character, and the source of great unhappiness in others."

"She's quite old enough," said Alice indignantly, "to know the commandment 'thou shalt not steal!'"

“But to know a commandment and to be restrained by it are two very different things,” said I. “How many of us know the commandment ‘thou shalt not covet,’ without being restrained by it!”

“Yes,” said Alice sleepily. And if I had sought to make her eyelids close by the most effectual soporific, I could not have better done so than by preaching a little.

In the morning, while Alice still slept, I went into Marian’s room. She had already unlocked her door, and was lying with her eyes thoughtfully fixed on a Carlo Dolce engraving on the opposite wall.

“Isabella!” exclaimed she surprised, “is anything the matter?”

“Yes,” said I, sitting down beside her, “the thief is found out.”

“Who?” cried Marian.

“Margaret Forest.”

“Oh how thankful I am that Emma is cleared!” and she clasped her hands and looked upwards. “But Margaret, that unhappy child! what could induce her? how has she been able to conceal it all this time? How has it been found out?”

She listened with intense interest while I told her. An angel could not have shown profounder sorrow and compassion at another’s sin.

“She must go,” said Marian, sighing deeply; “it will not do to retain such a companion for the others. Oh, that Mr. Grove may allow Emma to come back! Isabella, do let me ask him! Let *me* go to Heatherton instead of Jacintha! I think it will be the wiser plan. She is very irritable just now; I shall be more conciliating.”

“Jacintha has nothing to irritate her *now* with the Groves, and is anxious to make repa-

ration for her hastiness. You know, Marian, there is something generous, even noble, in her character when circumstances call it forth."

"I hope they may call it forth now, then," said Marian wistfully, "for it is fearful to me to see how stern and unyielding she can be. Where can Margaret be sent? Her father is never fixed anywhere; he is probably in his London chambers: her holidays were spent at Mrs. Callender's—I suppose she must go there."

"Yes," said I, "and I hope Mrs. Callender may view the matter in a right light, and see that we cannot help it; but she is a spoilt, violent-tempered woman, though an indolent one. She will very likely take up a strong prejudice against us, and bemoan Margaret as an injured innocent whom we have maligned."

"How *can* she, with such proofs?"

"True—but yet—I think I should like to go to her myself."

“Oh, Isabella ! it would be too hazardous to you, to undertake such a journey in this cold weather ! Write, if you will, but let *me* go to her.”

“Well, we must consult Jacintha—I will go to her now.”

“And I will dress as quickly as I can.”

I found Jacintha carrying on a sort of judicial inquiry, with no success. Margaret was resolutely taciturn, and looked obstinate. As we knew how obstinate she could be in matters of comparative unimportance, it did not surprise us that she should now be “mute of malice,” to avoid criminating herself. One or two admissions, however, she had inadvertently made, and the ill-will she betrayed towards Emma, whom she seemed to hate for being always above her in their class, strengthened the case against her, though it required no addition. As Margaret was now altogether

contumacious, refusing even to dress or wash herself, Jacintha turned the key upon her and withdrew with me into Marian's room, where we discussed what was to be done. Marian urgently begged to be allowed to go to Mr. Grove and Mrs. Callender, but Jacintha, who was very feverish, had taken up the idea that she owed it to Mr. Grove and Emma to exculpate the latter in person, and make personal confession of having been wrong; and with regard to Mrs. Callender, she summarily expressed her conviction that Marian was no match for her at all, and that she alone would know how to represent the matter to her. Though Marian's judgment, in my opinion, was to be depended on quite as much as Jacintha's or mine, Jacintha had a way of always setting it aside because she was the youngest, whereas she by no means deferred to mine because I was the eldest. In short, Jacintha

had always a will of her own, and in this affair it was rather too manifest that she had also “a temper :” at least what is commonly implied by the expression to mean just the reverse. The end was, that Marian and I, as usual, gave way ; that Jacintha, with her most resolute air, sent for a fly, dressed herself with taste, made a hearty breakfast, desired Miss Dixon and Hawkins to pack Miss Forest’s trunk and carry her her breakfast ; and then, just as *our* usual breakfast-time had arrived, the fly came to the door, the trunk was placed on the box, Margaret Forest marched down stairs between her two attendants, and cried out—“Good-by ! I’m so glad I’m going ! Ha, ha, ha !”—and then scrambled into the fly, followed by Jacintha in great majesty.

I said a little, but not much, when our shrunken party sat down to our breakfast. Lecturing was out of place, where each heart

could draw so obvious a moral from such a simple lesson. A few words—a sigh—and the subject was tacitly dropped. The meal was a dull one, and all seemed glad to go to lessons. In Jacintha's absence I took her class: it was a pleasure to me; I am naturally fond of imparting what little I know to the young, and probably because it *is* little, I have rather a faculty for doing it easily and with pleasure to my pupils. Thus, we all liked our task, independent of being glad to take refuge in it from a tendency to low spirits. The afternoon proved rainy; but a deplorable case of destitution coming to my knowledge, I proposed to the girls that we should all work as hard as we could for the poor family till dusk, and that they should, on the following day, have the privilege of bestowing their work on them themselves. This pleased all; I soon mustered old pieces and fragments enough to

set all fingers to work, while I myself found abundant employment in contriving and cutting out. For some time, the work itself required thought as well as industry, but when it was fairly in train, so that it could be pursued mechanically, I proposed that some one should read aloud. Marian chose an amusing book, and many a merry laugh was heard as the reading proceeded.

Jacintha did not return till late at night, just as the girls were going to bed. I had a blazing fire and a hot dish or two ready for her, and she came in looking cold and fagged enough to demand all my little attentions. The very tone of her voice in the hall, as she desired Hawkins to draw off her furred boots for her, told me that all had not gone strait. She entered the room, evidently out of tune.

“What a fire!” said she, crossly.

“I thought, poor thing, you would be

perishing with cold. Even in this warm corner the thermometer is only at fifty-five."

"Fifty-five to a person who, for hours, has been in a temperature twenty or thirty degrees lower! It is stifling. Bring the tea-things, Hawkins; I should like tea better than supper. Or a cup of strong coffee. Is there any?"

"It is all ready for you," said I, anxious to please.

"Do take away some of these dishes, Hawkins. One would think I was an alderman. What have you got there? A sweetbread? Well, you may leave that. Don't take away the browned potatoes. This coffee has scalded my mouth."

She sighed—I sighed.

"All has not gone well, I fear?" said I, anxiously.

“I’ll talk about business when Hawkins is gone.”

Hawkins sensibly retreated.

Jacintha, however, was in no mood to avail herself immediately of her departure. She ate abstractedly and silently, finished with a glass of wine, then threw herself into her easy-chair, and sat looking into the fire.

“Well?” said I, at last.

“Well, there’s little to tell. I have had a fatiguing day, and nothing but worry. When I reached Mrs. Callender’s, I sent in word that I wished to see her alone, and desired Margaret to remain in the fly till sent for; but scarcely had I entered Mrs. Callender’s boudoir, where she met me with her sweetest looks and studied smiles, when Margaret rushed past me, crying out, ‘They’ve sent me home, and say I’m a thief!’ Then, of course, ensued a scene.”

“ And Mrs. Callender—”

“ Mrs. Callender took Margaret’s part—would not hear a word I had to say—was sure Margaret had been treated very badly—had been injudiciously managed all along, or we should have obtained more control over her—and so forth, all in the girl’s presence, with Margaret hanging about her neck and darting at me sly looks of defiance. To conclude, Mrs. Callender said that Margaret was the orphan of her dearest friend, and she was bound by every principle of duty and affection to make her cause her own, and therefore should send a proper escort for her daughters to-morrow to remove them from our care.”

This was a blow !

“ In fact, she would hear nothing,” continued Jacintha, “ and I own I at last became very angry, and told her my opinion pretty freely ; saying I should think it due to our

characters to write full particulars to Mr. Callender. She assured me that Mr. Callender would make it a point of honour not to read a letter she requested him not to read, especially when she told him its nature. I bowed, and withdrew: leaving her and Margaret in an embracing attitude, admirably adapted for a *tableau*. What a hypocrite that child is!"

CHAPTER XIV.

Alas, regardless of their doom,
The little victims play !
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day !

Ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College.

MARIAN had quietly entered the room at the beginning of Jacintha's narration, and listened to it with sorrowful attention.

"Our school will be quite broken up," said she, after a pause, "reduced from twelve to seven!"

"What about Emma Grove?" said I, abruptly. "Is she coming back?"

"Oh dear, no," replied Jacintha, "I proceeded to Heatherton on leaving Mrs. Callender's, and sent in my name, but Mr. Grove

flatly refused to see me. However, I persevered, saying I had a communication to make of great importance, on which I was admitted. There he stood on his hearth-rug, with his hands behind him, and barely greeted me with a nod and a short, dry cough, not even inviting me to a seat. However, that was a lady's privilege, so I coolly took one, and then said I was sure he would rejoice to hear we had fully satisfied ourselves of his daughter's innocence. He said, not at all ; he had been satisfied with it all along, and it was a disgrace to us to have been ever otherwise. He had no curiosity, not he, to hear any of the particulars, for none but ourselves would ever have entertained so preposterous an opinion on the subject. In spite of this rebuff, I proceeded to relate the particulars of Margaret's delinquency, to which I saw that he listened with close attention, though

he only responded with ‘ha,’ and ‘hum.’ A pause then ensued ; which I broke by saying, ‘*Could* we have done otherwise?’ ‘Certainly you could,’ replied he, bluffly ; ‘I think you could have done otherwise from beginning to end.’ I was ready to say, ‘How?’ but thought it best not.”

“ Much,” interjected I.

“ So I inquired after Emma, to which he replied, ‘She’s not at home.’ I said I hoped she was well, and that I had been much in hopes of seeing her and telling her how sorry—but he interrupted me, bluntly, with ‘Ma’am, there’s no need. Her welfare can be no concern of yours, and the less that’s said on it the better.’ So I rose, bowed, and came away ; for what could be done with such a bear? He made a feint of seeing me out, but only advanced about two steps, and then retreated and rang the bell violently. He

offered me neither rest nor refreshment, though I was cold and hungry, and it was beginning to snow."

"Dear me, we have had no snow here!" said I.

"Oh, have you not!" said Jacintha, ironically: "look out and see for yourself."

"Certainly, the shutters have been closed ever since dusk," said I. "Did *you* know of the snow, Marian?"

Marian nodded. "Poor Jacintha!" said she.

"Poor Jacintha, you may well call me," replied Jacintha, with self-pity. "I had so many painful things to think of, that I did not look about me much; but when I did, I thought I had never travelled through a more bleak, disconsolate country. To improve matters, the driver lost his way."

"Oh!" said we both, sympathetically.

"And, just at dusk, the fly overturned."

"Oh, poor Jacintha ! What *did* you do ?"

"Do ? What could I ? but wait till it was set up again—not growing any the warmer for one of the windows being broken."

Marian started up, kissed her, and rested her hand on her shoulder.

"Don't pity me, please," said Jacintha, with a tear in her eye. "I am warmed and comforted now, and shall go to bed. It's all in the day's work."

"Yes, my dear sister," said I, "and a hard day's work you have had ! While we have been sitting still, warm and sheltered, *you* have undertaken a long and perilous journey, in inclement weather, and for our sakes encountered those who were more inhospitable than the season."

"Oh, we're all in the same boat," said Jacintha, smiling a little ; "you need not make me out a heroine."

We wished each other good-night. I undressed with a heavy heart, and thought how distressed the Callenders would be to hear they were going home.

They did not show as much grief as I had expected. Rose was much concerned, but said little, and did not shed a tear ; Henrietta cried, but only, I think, at parting with Fanny Ward, with whom she had formed a close intimacy. A consequential lady's-maid came to fetch them, and accomplished her purpose with great expedition. It was just before dinner, but she said she was directed to permit no delay, so they drove away, and our shrunken party sat down to a meal that to some of us was comfortless enough, while the mirth of those who did not trouble themselves with passing events seemed rather unseasonable.

Cheerfulness, however, was a desideratum.

I hinted it to Marian, who immediately acted upon it, and when it grew dusk, I could hear merry voices at Christmas games in the school-room, while Jacintha and I sat by the fire and sighed. After a time, she said, "This won't do," and went to the piano, and played some polkas that jarred on my nerves sadly. I said "Something serious, please;" so then she sang, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," throwing her whole soul into it, till my eyes overflowed with quiet tears.

Fanny Ward had stolen in on hearing the singing, preferring her request for admission by a look, to which I as mutely responded in assent. She seated herself on a low stool at the other side of the fire, her head in the shade; and presently I saw the little white pocket handkerchief with ribbed border drawn out and stealthily applied to her eyes. Poor Fanny! we are apt to laugh at school-girl

friendships, but they are often more genuine, and formed on a more intimate knowledge of real character, than those which we contract in later life ; and say that some of them are childish and fleeting,—are they never such in riper years ?

Jacintha, after a pause, turned about, and looking at us, said—

“ You couple of dummies ! ”

“ We have paid you a high compliment,” said I, “ for you have made both of us cry.”

“ Oh, that’s the case, is it ! ” said Jacintha, in good-humour, for she was very alive to praise ; and, seating herself beside Fanny, who made a movement to rise, she passed her hand caressingly over her flaxen hair, saying, “ Don’t go, child ; ” and the next time I looked up, I saw her arm round Fanny’s neck and their hands locked together. Jacintha could be very caressing sometimes, and her power over the affections was then irresistible :

the pity was that she had not quite an even temper.

All at once, the door flew open, and—

“Ladies, an interlude is going to be performed by Her Majesty’s servants of Poplar House!” cried Marian: and in poured a motley crew of

Black spirits and white,
Blue spirits and grey,

who “did their spiriting gently,” and improvised a passing idea of Marian’s with good effect; after which they trooped out as confusedly as Comus’s rabble-rout. Where was school discipline? Ay, where was it, indeed! It would have been an awful sight to Mrs. Cole and Miss Melissa; and yet, somehow, no insubordination ensued, and I, for one, was all the better for it. As they danced off, Fanny Ward danced off with them, polking with Marian.

At prayer-time, I observed a good deal of

coughing and sniffing, and two of the girls proved to have such troublesome colds, that I desired them to remain in bed the following morning, unless they were better. In the morning, they were not better, but worse; and Matilda Fox was so feverish, and complained of so many aches and pains, that I thought it expedient to send for Mr. Herne.

This was the first time we had had a doctor in the house. Marian had remarked, only a few evenings before, what a singular immunity we had had; and I had said, with a kind of presentiment of evil, “Oh, Marian! don’t boast;” to which she had temperately replied, “No, I did not mean to boast—I am only thankful.”

And now, here was the doctor! What a good thing it is, that when a nice, comfortable-looking medical man first crosses the threshold, imparting re-assurance by his very smile,

people don't know how often they shall see him! Their hearts would sink, if they knew all the scenes with which he and they are to be associated.

Mr. Herne was a very pleasant, middle-aged, married man, in good practice: it was considered a treat to see him when people were not seriously ill; and when they *were*—oh! then how they hung upon his looks—what an oracle he became! And well he might!

Mr. Herne pronounced Matilda to be sicken-ing of fever, that might or might not be infectious. She was still removable, and as her mother only lived at the other end of the town, he thought she had better be removed.

I hesitated about taking her out of her warm bed, even to be wrapped in blankets. There was still a sprinkling of snow on the ground, and I not only demurred, from humanity towards the child, but I felt that

our school was just now under a cloud, which a garbled version of simple facts might thicken and darken.

"As you think best," said Mr. Herne, in reply. (We were conferring in my own little parlour.) "The little girl may do well: I have only suggested a precautionary measure for the sake of others."

Jacintha often accused me of irresolution. I was irresolute now.

"Suppose we refer it to Mrs. Fox," said I. "If she does not object to the hazard, it will certainly be better for her daughter to be nursed at home."

So I wrote to Mrs. Fox. And Mrs. Fox, in reply, said she was just going to an evening party, and had perfect confidence in our nursing. So indifferent as some people are!—even mothers!—I cannot understand it. Her note was not written till quite late in the

evening ; much too late for the removal to be attempted with safety : we had given up the idea of it. Mrs. Fox came to see her little girl the next day : she was very nicely dressed, and looked very comely and comfortable. She gave us the most flattering assurances of her entire confidence in us ; was happy to say Matilda never took things heavily ; was sure she was not going to be ill now ; felt no reluctance to leave her in our hands, while she spent a few days in London, and trusted to find dear Matilda quite well on her return. And, leaving with her a well-filled *bonbonnière*, she kissed her, smiled sweetly, and sailed away.

The little Duncans proved to have influenza. I kept them in bed and wrote to their mother, who, on account of her chest, I regret to say, was at Torquay. Mr. Duncan had retired from business ; and now that he could live where he liked, as far as that was concerned,

he seemed doomed to be settled on the southern coast, on account of his wife. There was no need to frighten her ; nor did I. In her reply, she expressed no uneasiness, but begged I would send her a daily *bulletin*, till her little girls were convalescent. She wrote quite a chatty letter, and said they had fallen in with a family of the name of Mortlake, who had made many inquiries about us, and she had spoken of us very freely, as she thought they might have a pupil for us in view.

I did not know whether this would vex or please Jacintha, so I gave her the note without comment. I found she would rather have been without either note or comment.

“ When *will* people learn not to meddle with their neighbours’ affairs ? ” cried she. “ Just as if I should want a niece of Mr. Mortlake’s for a pupil ! O dear me ! ”

I observed, afterwards, that her eyes looked

very heavy. But it was not with crying ; she had caught the influenza, as had Miss Dixon, and two or three others of us. When Mr. Herne came, he said merrily, “It will go through the house :” but it was no source of merriment to me ; though I always felt in my element when nursing was required. In vain Jacintha and Marian said, “Isabella ! you will make yourself ill !” I did no such thing, took prudent precautions, kept out of draughts, went down into the cold drawing-room as seldom as I could, and took up my post, now by one bedside, now by another, knitting, chatting, and keeping my little patients quietly amused, which I could do as well as the strongest of them.

Miss Dixon, whose bedroom was shared by Matilda Fox, said she could nurse her cold there as well as anywhere else ; and as Matilda required attention, it was as well to let Miss

Dixon confine herself to that room as not, since she had no fear of the fever, and if she were to have it, had probably taken it already.

Jacintha battled manfully with her attack, and would not succumb, though it was fearful to hear her cough. Our cook, who was a selfish woman, and would not put herself out of the way in any emergency, was, to do her justice, a capital maker of broths and arrowroot, of which she sent up abundant supplies: and Hawkins trotted up and down stairs with them till she was ready to drop. At length, poor Hawkins was laid low, and *that* was indeed a loss; for the under servants poorly supplied her place. Marian feared they neglected her dear old Hawkins, and stole up into her attic many times a day, which so distressed Hawkins, that she declared if Miss Marian would not give it up, she would

leave her bed, dress herself, and sit by the kitchen fire.

She was quite too ill for this, therefore a compromise was made, the terms of which Marian did not keep with quite her usual faithfulness ; and when Hawkins threatened to get up, Mr. Herne's name was used with great authority.

Then Sarah, the under-housemaid, began to look woful and cough a little. She was very easily discouraged at any time ; and when I said to Mr. Herne I thought we must engage a temporary nurse, and asked him if he could recommend one who was trustworthy and efficient, he said, “To tell you the truth, even if it had not been for those limitations, I fear I could not assist you, for just now every one is laid aside. You fancy your case an uncommon one, but I have seventy influenza cases now on my books, to

say nothing of other diseases attributable, more or less, to the season, and every nurse is engaged or ill herself."

I afterwards found this was no exaggerated statement, and that in London, indeed, the mortality was fearful—influenza slaying more victims than the more greatly dreaded cholera. Laura wrote word to Jacintha, that she met hearses and walking-funerals at every turn ; that in three of the largest shops in Regent Street every customer was buying black ; that in omnibuses frequently every passenger was in black ; that in driving along Oxford Street she had only seen three genteel persons who were not in mourning. As for church bells, they were continually tolling.

This was awful : and I read the influenza reports daily printed in the *Times* with morbid avidity, but put them out of the way of my sisters when I could. Whenever one tries a

little *ruse* of this kind, however, it is generally unsuccessful : Marian and Jacintha were quite as much interested in the bills of mortality as I was, and Marian plainly said, “What is the use of not knowing what is going on among our fellow-creatures, Isabella ? Surely, we ought to pity them, and pray for them, though we cannot relieve them ; and as long as we are somewhat less severely visited, we ought to be very thankful. I think people neglect God’s plain purpose in not taking a very serious view of such visitations. He *means* us to be awed by them, and as we none of us know we shall escape, we ought to prepare ourselves for the most serious consequences ; that, if they should occur, we need not be afraid with any amazement.”

This was so much my own feeling, that thenceforth I attempted no concealment, and even read the reports aloud after the girls

had gone to bed, till Jacintha at length cried—

“Isabella, your voice really becomes more and more lugubrious. For pity’s sake, don’t read me any more such accounts, unless you mean to make me break down altogether. You quite give me the horrors !”

When Jacintha said this, she was preparing to sit up all night with poor little Lucy Field. We had now two or three very severe cases, which Mr. Herne was watching with anxiety ; but neither he nor I had considered Lucy’s the worst till within the last few hours. Still I could not charge myself with neglect of her. I had been with her continually, and never left her except under proper charge ; but she had been rather light-headed for two days, and had said such funny things, that it was impossible for any of her attendants to help smiling at them ; and this, I suppose, got

us into the way of thinking that the dear little girl was not so ill as either of the Duncans, who were more evidently suffering. This day, however, the case had altered. Marian came into my room early the next morning, with tears in her eyes, and said, “Isabella, do come and see Lucy: she no longer rambles, but persists in a low muttering, and though her eyes are open, they have the strangest look, and I am sure she does not see us.”

Much alarmed, I went to her instantly, and found her exactly as Marian had described. Jacintha was bending over her with a look of deep care. The instant I appeared, she looked up, and said in an under tone, “Send for Mr. Herne.” I hastily did so, and then returned, Marian continuing to stand at the foot of the bed, the picture of woe.

When Mr. Herne came, he said aside to

me, "Send for her mother." I begged Marian to do so, and remained at my post. I said, "Lucy, love, do you hear me?" No answer. Dismayed, I turned to Mr. Herne, and whispered, "Is there any hope?" He shook his head. My heart gave such a bound, and then seemed to die. I said, "What would be the first favourable sign?" He sadly replied, "To cease that muttering, and close her eyes." I sighed. Presently I said, "She seems choking." He did not answer. It ceased. She gave four such peaceful breaths! I looked at him—hopefully—dismayed! He said, "Poor little soul! All is over!"









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